

The
Faith
OF AN
Unrepentant
Liberal

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THE FAITH OF AN
UNREPENTANT LIBERAL

By A. POWELL DAVIES

AMERICAN DESTINY

*The
Faith
OF AN
Unrepentant
Liberal*

by A. POWELL DAVIES

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*O God, our broken images lie all about
us. Thy time has come. Kindle afresh
the flame of courage and lead us on.*

PREFACE

ANYONE who publishes a book of sermons nowadays is supposed to make some apology. I make none whatever. In my own humble way, I try to say in my sermons as much as I can of the truth that is in me, and I believe increasingly that only at the level of religion — honest, believable religion — can any of the problems that oppress our age be brought towards solution.

The sermons in this book do not form a series, in the sense of developing a thesis, but all of them have a common foundation — the principles of free religion. They were preached from a free pulpit, some of them in my former parish of Summit, New Jersey, others to my present congregation in Washington, D.C. To both these congregations I acknowledge my indebtedness.

As to the development of a thesis, I, like many others, believe religion does need a plain restatement, one that reckons candidly with what the modern age requires. In a book upon which I am working, *The Religion of Reality*, I shall try to make the small but unfettered contribution of a modern-minded Unitarian preacher to this necessary task. Meanwhile, in response to the kind encouragement of many friends, some of whom I have never met but who read my printed sermons, I have selected the following discourses on varied subjects to be put together in a book.

To my assistant, Miss Jane Grey Wheeler, I express my gratitude for producing a first draft of these sermons from my notes. Both to her and to my colleague, Mr. Laurence C. Staples, I am indebted for proofreading — as, at all times, for many kinds of useful and essential help.

A. POWELL DAVIES

WASHINGTON, D.C.
January 15, 1946

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THE FAITH OF AN
UNREPENTANT LIBERAL

The Faith of an Unrepentant Liberal

NEVER was the need for faith as desperate as now; and never was it more essential that belief be genuine. We cannot face the future empty-hearted; we cannot face it with an untrue creed. Yet it is one of the perversities of the modern world's most crucial hour that many who could find and share the faith we need devote themselves to its obstruction.

In the age of opportunity and peril that confronts us, only disaster can be harvested from false beliefs. The religions of the creeds are obsolescent; they have no will to face reality; the basis of their claims expired with yesterday; to what is now required they are irrelevant; the authority of myth and miracle is over. Surely it should be clear at last that all the compromises of religion must be ended. The world is much too dangerous for anything but truth.

Only this can now avail us: that we leave the childhood of the race behind and come to spiritual maturity.

Yet there are those so frightened by the future, and at the same time so fettered by the past, that even today, while we race with catastrophe, they call upon their hearers to repudiate the only faith and purpose that could save them, and be dedicated to a dying system of belief. "Come back!" they cry. "Back to the ancient worship and the

ancient ways. Back to the supernatural! Back to a helpless and imploring piety! Back to dependency!" Back to everything, in fact, which proved too weak and false to hinder or prevent two deadly, world-engulfing wars.

"But hear us!" they plead. "See what has happened! Modern man has overreached himself. Doom is at hand. Freedom at last is faced with retribution. . . Ah! if only the ancient faith had never been forsaken! If only men had gone on being obedient to the jealous God who brooks no trespass on his own authority! If only they had left the secrets of the universe in the keeping of Divine Providence, the mastery of nature in the hands of the Almighty One! But no, mankind has wickedly persisted in its great apostasy. It has followed after the devices and desires of its own heart; it has quenched its thirst for knowledge at the bitter cisterns of its own contriving; it has surrendered to a sacrilegious urge for infinite discovery and multifold invention; and now, the Sodom of science and the Gomorrah of rational belief are calling down fire from heaven to consume them! God has decreed destruction! Only a prompt return to the traditional faith, a contrite and abject submission to authoritarian doctrines can possibly avail us."

Thus runs the claim of the defeated, the challenge of the voice of yesterday. And with this conclusion: that we must now give up, renounce and utterly abhor the mortal sin of liberalism, especially in religion, for it is liberalism which has thus deluded and misled us. It caused us to put our trust in the free exertions of our own minds instead of in the dogmas of the long-established churches; it encouraged us to look for progress rather than salvation from unchangeable depravity, to place reliance in the growth of goodness instead of praying for separation from the evil of a hopeless

and desponding world. Yes, it was liberalism which forswore the supernatural and forsook the ancient revelation; it was liberalism which fostered science, liberalism which placed the stamp of its approval on the quest for never-ending new discovery, liberalism which brought us to our present impasse and liberalism which will bring us to our final ruin and complete disaster, if we let it.

Now, before we consider this rather strenuous accusation — and of course, only the emphasis is new: the charge itself is almost venerable — it may be well to seek some definitions. People who do not like liberalism call everything liberal which they do not like. Until they are found out, this naturally gives them a tactical advantage, for they can simply add up all the evils of the modern age, and all the unsolved problems, and lay them at the door of liberalism. Until we had liberalism, they say, we did not have these evils; nor did we have these problems; and so, quite clearly, the liberals are to blame. It is amazing how seldom this *non sequitur* is noticed and exposed. Even liberals, for some strange reason, are at times inveigled by it. They do not see that their accusers are adroitly covering up their own deficiencies, their own confusion. Not only covering them up, but infecting liberals with them. That is why I say we had better seek some definitions.

What, let us ask, is liberalism? Let us admit at once that it is not an easy thing to define. This is not because it is vague but because it is comprehensive. Definition always limits a word — it is essential that it should — but some words, by their very nature, are difficult to limit. Especially is this true of the word *liberal*. For there is a sense in which liberalism is and always has been the very contradiction of

limitation. Yet, I think we can define it fairly closely; and much more accurately than our opponents wish.

The common denominator of all liberalism is devotion to liberty. The two words, of course, come from the same root. *Liberalism is that which liberates*. Its object is to loosen bondage, whether of the mind or of the person, whether of individuals or societies, and its motivation is the faith that human life can only reach its fullest stature through continuous liberation — through the struggle to be free.

It is from this that every kind of liberal purpose has been born. *Political* liberals have sought to emancipate themselves and all others from servitude to ancient and oppressive systems, from inferior citizenship, from subjugation to the will of overlords, believing that that society is best where all are most free to participate in ruling it, in making its laws, in deciding the directions it shall take. This kind of liberalism is called democracy and it is far from easy to maintain. Yet, we who have seen its alternatives in action are very sure that liberal democracy is a political achievement that we are far from ready to lose.

Educational liberals have believed that access to human knowledge and the privilege of participating in increasing it are natural human rights and should be universal. They have thought that the wisdom of the past, while it should be respected and discerningly transmitted, should never be a bondage, a fetter to the mind. They have resisted all attempts to mold opinion through dogmatic teachings. And certainly, we who have seen this attitude scorned and forsaken and whole nations propagandized in the name of unity and mass efficiency — we who have seen the minds of peoples maimed and crippled, and the truth that could have

saved them perverted and distorted — can have no wish to see an end to liberal principles of education.

In *religion*, the liberal stood for the unhindered use of the free mind in arriving at conviction. Truth he declared to be more holy than any creed, more sacred than even the most sanctified of dogmas. He refused to accept authoritarian “revelations” which contradicted the revelation he found in his own experience. He was prepared to be submissive to doctrines and respectful to theologies only if they could justify themselves in the forum of unsheltered truth. He searched the Scriptures to determine their actual range of application, their intrinsic authority and their dependability; he demanded of churches and hierarchies that they demonstrate their usefulness and prove their worth; he called every religious belief which could not be justified by evidence or reason a speculation, and every tenet which was contradicted by the force of fact a superstition. And he proposed to proclaim abroad all new discoveries, no matter what the consequence to vested interests and established institutions. Not only mind but conscience must be free. Otherwise, it was less a conscience than it should be.

Freedom, therefore — increasing freedom throughout the entire scope of human life — has been the watchword of liberalism. No matter what the ancient systems of authority attempted to dictate, the liberal has claimed the freedom to explore anew; to accept what evidence and reason justify; to strike out into the unknown — carrying the torch of truth anywhere and everywhere that truth might go. This has meant, just as the accusers say, that liberals have always accepted the scientific attitude and have labored to extend it. They have wanted a full development of the whole field of human knowledge, and the conquest of ignorance and su-

perstition everywhere. To achieve this, they have preached the open mind and, so far as they were faithful to their precepts, have practised it. They have also preached the possibility of endless progress, the power of man to share the shaping of his destiny; and they have instituted and encouraged all such changes and reforms as might be likely to contribute to a saner, happier, better world.

It is of this, today, that liberals stand accused. They emphasized the virtue and the promise in the life of man instead of focusing their thought upon his helplessness beneath the rule of evil; and they tried to *make* a better world in place of leaving it to false, fallacious hopes of Providential intervention. They did not pray that God would save them from themselves through some impossible, miraculous "salvation." They prayed that God would save them *in and through* themselves while working out their own salvation.

As one such liberal, I glory in the accusation. I am a liberal without apology, a liberal without misgivings, a liberal without regret. I am an unrepentant liberal. So far as I am sorry for anything, it is not because I am a liberal, but that I am not more liberal than I am. Of this I am certain: that no return to false beliefs or authoritarian folklore can avail us in the world tomorrow — any more than in the recent past. Their day is over. Only the free mind can possess the future. Lives in bondage to the supernatural fantasies will never find the courage or the strength.

And now, having defined liberalism and declared my own allegiance to it, let me proceed to deal with the confusion in the accusation made against it. For what traditionalists always love to do is to try to make liberals accountable not only for the outlook and the purposes which are truly theirs, but for the degree to which that outlook has not pre-

vailed and the extent to which those purposes are not accomplished. They also try to blame the liberals for the actual emergence of the problems which the modern age must face. In neither case is the imputation justified or the indictment really scrupulous or honest.

From the beginning, liberals have found themselves in opposition to the guardians of established institutions and beliefs. It is natural that these custodians of depleted symbols and vacated sepulchers should feel alarmed. They saw what freedom might entail. Their fright, of course, was genuine. So was their bondage to the past. They were afraid of new, uncharted areas of experience; the world was growing much too wide. In agoraphobic panic, they crowded closer to their ancient prisons, shouting their warnings to the world to join them and be sheltered from a universe that grew too big. "Come back," they cried, "and wear the old familiar fetters. The liberals mislead you. You are not able to be free." It is not to be expected, therefore, that liberalism would have the benefit of fair appraisal from those who have feared and distrusted it, or that cause and consequence could have an honest exposition from those whose only refuge is their own retreat. To maintain their standpoint, they had to distort what challenged it — distort it and confuse it. Confusion was indeed essential; and to feed their illusion of security they had to spread confusion; and then present their obsolescent doctrines as the only antidote. Small wonder that the modern age despairs of finding what it might believe!

What are the facts? The first fact is that the problems of the modern age are no more caused by liberalism than by anything else. They emerge *with* liberalism through the growth of man towards a further measure of fulfillment.

They are brought about because in history no particular cycle can be permanent: each age, in reaching its completion, is superseded by a new one. They are caused by innovating factors entering into human life, produced by all the people in the world; and from the impulse dwelling in the heart of life itself which urges living creatures onward.

What it was, ultimately, which brought about a revolution in our methods for obtaining knowledge, followed by an outflow of applied discovery and technical invention — what, in short, is finally responsible for modern science and technology — no historian really knows. Events can be described — I know that — step by step and stage by stage, but nobody can say just why they first began to happen when they did, or what at last controlled them. Nobody can say it, that is, except in terms of a rational belief that life itself is enterprising and its very nature innovating and adventurous. This, of course, is what the liberal faith declares. But let us continue. As they mounted up, the sum of these events, these new inventions, these new discoveries, produced enormous problems — economic problems, social problems, political problems, international problems. Liberals did not invent these problems. Liberals, in fact, being themselves in part the product of the changes brought about, but not discordant with them, pointed out the way to solve them, whereas traditionalists merely wept because the problems had emerged at all.

Liberals no more than conservatives produced the need that human beings increase their mental range and moral stature if they hoped to meet the challenge of the epoch into which humanity had entered. The fact was — and is — that increased mental range and improved moral stature are essential, liberals or no liberals. But only the liberal way,

the way of unbinding the mind and unfettering the spirit can possibly produce the mental, moral level which can meet these indispensable requirements.

Nor did liberals *make* the evil which persists in human nature. It is this evil, this reluctance, this perverseness, which has impeded progress. It is this same evil which now threatens ruin and disaster. Not the evil in the hearts of any one category amongst us, but the evil in the hearts of all of us. It is against this evil, together with the ignorance and prejudice which reinforce it, that liberalism has contended. Knowing that without enlightenment, without fidelity to actual fact and honest truth, without man's own exertions and his fullest, furthestmost endeavors, this evil would never be overcome, liberalism forsook the false beliefs in supernatural interventions and salvations — interventions which never took place and salvations which left man just as badly off as he was before — and sought the guidance of the God who thinks through human thoughts and speaks through human consciences, the God who works through human striving and fulfills his purpose in man's own laborious toil. That all men have not yet accepted this approach is not the fault of liberals, and that all liberals have not lived up to its standards is not the fault of liberalism.

To solve the problems of the modern world we need both better liberals and more widespread liberalism. Certainly such problems will never be resolved by those who in their outlook and belief remain enslaved by doctrines which are false. Realities will never yield to creeds which draw their nurture and support from ignorance and have to be protected from the naked light of truth. These are the creedal systems which accept support and shelter from reactionary tyrannies; which, at their worst, preserve their insti-

tutions by a partnership with despotism and corruption. Theirs are the patterns of belief which cloud intelligence and siphon off the moral energies for want of which humanity is insufficient to the claims upon it, being left disabled and enfeebled. While, therefore, liberalism did not produce the problems of the modern world, it is the simple truth that only liberalism, lifted to the level of the present need, can ever hope to solve them.

And it is this which traditionalists have hindered and impeded. In the effort to maintain their institutions, their importance, their authority, and because they could not face reality, they have obstructed vital progress and held back the march of man to spiritual maturity.

If science today has placed in human hands immense potentialities for ruin and destruction, the peril is not because we have become too scientific, but because our science is restricted. We have put too little science into sociology, too little of its method into national and international affairs, too little into politics. The fault is not in science, but in resistance to its method; and in the insufficient spread of it. Let us dispel the lies conclusively; let us require ourselves and all mankind to face the truth: the peril does not come from technological developments or scientific disciplines; it comes from ignorance and evil, from prejudice and false opinion, from delusive hopes and narrow aims; and these are the things which liberalism has sought to remedy.

Let us make clear another fact. The world to which traditionalists would like us to return was never such a world as they describe. It was a world of famine and disease, a world of many cruelties and few humanities, a world of arrogant and avaricious hierarchies, of tyranny and oppression, of ignorance and fear, of toil and tears. It is the world

which tyrants and authoritarians have been trying to revive, no matter what the cost in blood and agony; and the world which every decent man and woman, for several centuries, has been trying to leave behind.

Nor are these modern prophets of retreat at all consistent. They do not take the consequences of their own assumptions. They want the benefits of recent progress without accepting honestly its implications. I have heard of few traditionalists who would impugn the scientific method when it comes to being cured by penicillin, or who disdain the opportunities offered by the technological achievement embodied in a broadcasting station. No, they are more than willing to let science save their lives, even though they fulminate against it in their pulpits. Science never seems to overreach itself in reaching their bedsides, but only when it undermines their creeds. If it looks as though providence is calling them to heaven, whereas penicillin would keep them a little longer on the earth, they show an instant and unswerving preference for the pagan benefits of penicillin. They do not want to die under a medieval doctor but they are willing that mankind risk its future with a medieval faith. If wicked science and ingenious invention provide the radio to take their voices to a million homes, they find that God permits it. Yet the same scientific approach, the same quest for knowledge, the same fidelity to provable, experimental fact is in the radio and penicillin as in the modern knowledge that upsets the creeds or in the power to split the atom. Indeed, the fundamentalist believer who puts on spectacles to read the Athanasian Creed is demonstrating scientific laws of optics, which, if he thought about them, would make the creed a waste of time to bother with. For the principles embodied in the spectacles must lead in-

fallibly to those by which we know the composition of the elements or measure distances between the stars. There is no turning back, even if we wished to turn back. There is no living outside of this age, even for traditionalists.

I say, again, let us have done with confusion. The liberating faith is the only possible faith for the world into which we are moving. It makes problems more difficult only for those who resist and obstruct the truth. It demands the impossible only from those who have lost the will to win a full humanity, who have let the inner sources of all honest faith decay and lost their courage.

For too long, now, men have feared to be fully and altogether men. The time has come for liberation from their fears; the time to seek a nobler stature.

There is a religion that says Freedom! Freedom from ignorance and false belief. Freedom from spurious claims and bitter prejudices. Freedom to seek the truth, both old and new, and freedom to follow it. Freedom from the hates and greeds that divide mankind and spill the blood of every generation. Freedom for honest thought. Freedom for equal justice, freedom to seek the true, the good and the beautiful with minds unimpaired by cramping dogmas and spirits uncrippled by abject dependence. There is a religion that adds to Freedom, Universal Brotherhood! — a religion that says mankind is not divided — except by ignorance and prejudice and hate — that sees mankind as naturally one and waiting to be spiritually united; a religion which proclaims an end to creedal reservations and exclusions — and declares a brotherhood unbounded! a religion that knows that we shall never find the fullness of the wonder and the glory of life until we are tall enough in moral stature to deserve it; that we shall never have hearts big enough for the

love we call the love of God until we have made them big enough for the world-wide love of man.

Only this faith in freedom linked with universal brotherhood can be enough to save the world and then rebuild it. All lesser faiths are dwindling and collapsing — or running for protection to brutality and tyranny. They will be swept away or ridden to their doom by fierce fanaticisms to which they yield in desperation. Only this faith, this free and universal faith, is now possible; only this faith is powerful. Only this faith can march with truth; only this faith can liberate us from the fear and ignorance of the past or set us free towards the future: the faith that begins in individual freedom of belief and goes out to the limitless, building throughout the world the Free and Universal Church.

I am an unrepentant liberal. If the gods of yesterday are dying, I am willing that they die. For there is a God who never dies, the one and only living God whose face is ever set towards tomorrow. And for those who follow where he leads, the winds of morning are already blowing, and however long the night may linger, the day of triumph is in sight.

Religion and Nostalgia

THE greatest perils seldom appear as such; they do not emerge dramatically, they do not proclaim themselves, they come by quiet encroachment. If this seems to be in contradiction of our situation at the present time, it is only because we have not sufficiently considered our situation. It is not in the last analysis the plethora of deadly inventions which is menacing mankind, but man's own inadequacy, the numbness in his will to act, the insolvency of his intellect, the disease of his spirit. None of these disabling factors manifested themselves with sensational suddenness; they came as they have always come, softly, gently, insidiously. Yet it is in them much more than in the new inventions that our great and growing danger lies. Even without the new inventions we were threatening to destroy ourselves, just as simpler civilizations did before us; the causes are the same as in the earlier instances: not factors in the condition of the world we need to change so much as factors in the condition of man, the being called upon to make the changes.

Nothing is more mistaken than to look to technological developments for defense against the perils which confront us. Such developments, though certain to take place, will

merely palliate our dangers, not remove them. They will lengthen a little the period necessary for one measure or another of destruction. If we doubt it, we need only remember past experience. The Maginot Line was supposed to be the answer to the fears of pre-war France; but the Maginot Line failed, not only because in war one technological development is always partly met or circumvented by another, but because it did not meet the real requirement: it did not cure the condition of France. I do not mean by this that I would abandon the quest for new defensive weapons; in our present lamentable situation it is indispensable. What I am saying is that if we make this our reliance, if we trust our future to it, then we are resting the fate of the world on an extremely flimsy hope.

Indeed, we might go farther and say that it is not the scientific laboratories which at the present moment are placing us under such a fearful weight of hazard — whether those laboratories are located in our own or any other country — so much as our drifting and dilatory policy, our confused and ineffective administration in Germany, an administration which the newspapers tell us is being regarded by the German people with increasing contempt, our indeterminate diplomacy, our irresponsibility in European conditions of dearth and famine, our emotional economics within our own country — all that, in fact, adds up to the pitiful betrayal of our brief and transient hour of opportunity, the tragic waste of days and weeks which, once they are gone, will never come again.

If you think I am merciless in saying so, I can only reply that any man who vows to give the conscience of his time a voice is bound to speak as I am doing.

For the deficiency of mankind is spiritual, the sickness

of the world is sickness of the soul. Some of this sickness is due to mutiny, rebellion against the moral claims we do not wish to meet. The kind of justice, the kind of good will in action, the kind of brotherhood which are so insistently demanded of us are more than we are willing for. We know perfectly well that these demands are right; no matter what our other beliefs, no matter what our multitude of doubts, we know by all the force of reason beating down upon our intellects, by all the weight of evidence which war so bloodily has demonstrated to us, by all the potency of every factor operating in the world about us, that these demands are right. But we rebel against them. That is part of our sickness. We can see it plainly. Try as we will, we cannot hide it or disguise it. Perhaps if we had no other malady than this we might at last be willing to be cured.

But we have. We have the malady of not knowing what we believe. We have the ailment of doubting whether the game of life is worth the candle. We are enfeebled by disordered thinking, enervated by prejudice and false opinion. And we are unnerved and debilitated by sheer nostalgia. Unaware and heedless of it as we mostly are, the will power of the entire modern world is deeply undermined by discontentment — discontentment with the modern world itself. Our age is homesick.

That is what I want to talk about this morning. The word "nostalgia" comes from two Greek words, one of which means a turning towards home. The other, pain. And so nostalgia means a painful yearning to be at home, a heartsickness for the familiar which is far away. Nearly everybody knows what homesickness is in the literal sense, for nearly everybody has felt its pangs. Away from home, a stranger in a strange place, the daily associations of an ac-

customed life broken off, separated by distance from the people we know and love, our hearts turn with painful longing to the life we have left behind us. We want to return. We dream of it, conjure it up in imagination, reach out towards it in anguished and almost desolate craving. No matter how much enjoyment, how much interest may be offered us to fill the passing hour, we feel like exiles, banished from all we really care for. We want to be at home. All the imperfections, all the dissatisfactions of the previous state of things from which we are now severed we cause to melt away. We idealize, we build up a memory of flawless happiness. We want it back, we want the past restored, we want to recover what time and distance have removed; in a word, we are homesick, we want to be at home.

This is what it is for an individual to be homesick, especially perhaps when he first leaves home. And this, in the main, is curable. In time, it generally cures itself. But there is a wider homesickness, far more durable and far more comprehensive. In this second sense, we might say that as far back as history reaches, mankind has always been homesick. The ancients used to picture a golden age when once the world was happy and contented, and they wove some of their richest folklore about the theme of its perfections. This age was always behind them, as the Garden of Eden was for the people of the Bible. It was out of a paradise, a prehistoric elysium, an earthly heaven of some kind, that man had been cast out. Hence all his troubles, all his toil and sorrow. He had been ejected into a state of things for which he was ill-adapted. He would like to be back in the golden age, back in the Garden of Eden, back in the paradise from which he had been thrown.

We might say, then, that throughout historic time man

has been nostalgic. Sometimes he has projected his golden age, the heaven of his dreams, out of the past into another world, another existence altogether. Knowing that the past could not be recaptured or happiness made retroactive, and despairing of achieving happiness in the world of actual daily living, the real world of his own experience, he imagined a paradise in which he could be resurrected after death, or one his ghostly presence might inhabit. He seldom believed in this paradise strongly enough to be eager to die right away and thereby enter it without unnecessary waiting. The will to live in the "here and now" was strong enough to keep him in the "here and now" no matter how badly he was adjusted to it; but he satisfied his longing for a more contented, happier life by believing as strongly as possible that he might inherit it in another existence. Psychologically, the two fantasies proceed from the same root. They have little to do with the possibility or otherwise of a life after death, for that is a question which can be considered without reference to fantasy — without reference to heavens and hells of any kind.

The heavens of man's imagining have never been really unearthly or based upon some other mode of existence: their characteristics have been transferred from the possibilities of earthly life itself. The point to be kept clear is that whether projected into a celestial future or left in a terrestrial past man's paradises were invented to soothe or explain his discontent, his painful maladjustment to reality, his wish that his desires might be granted, his longing to be at home.

Well, was there ever such an ancient yesterday of golden satisfactions and contentment? Was there ever such a past, or is it all imagination?

The answer to this question depends on what you mean when you ask it. In the folklore sense there never was a golden age. But just the same, it is not a rootless product of imagination. Modern man contains within himself not only the inheritance of his *biological* past, his animal past in the sense with which we are all familiar, the sense expounded in the doctrine of biological evolution. He contains within himself a heritage also from his *psychological* past, obscure and difficult as it is to identify and explain. And part of that heritage is a vague, shapeless memory of animal existence, an existence in which there was not mentality enough to be able to look back or look forward, an existence which was always in the present only, an instinctive level of existence with no knowledge of problems to be solved and questions to be answered, no awareness of good and evil. In short, an animal level of existence. It is this vague, shapeless memory which man has idealized into a golden age of the past, a Garden of Eden from which he was cast out. That is why, in the Old Testament story, you read of man's eating of the tree of knowledge and losing his innocence. That is why, in all the stories of such gardens, such paradises — and there are many — you always find some step described which causes man to become aware of himself as a partner in the shaping of his own fate — and immediately regretting it. In other words, the folklore arises to explain the psychological experience of ceasing to be merely animal and beginning to be human.

It is far from easy to be human. It is not even entirely easy to remain a higher animal. For a third of his life — that is to say, for about eight hours out of every twenty-four — man sinks back into a level of existence which is almost vegetable; he goes to sleep. He loses for a while a great part

even of his animal awareness. But he finds it much easier to be a fairly successful higher animal than he does to be a fully human being. So in the stress and struggle of trying to maintain his human level he reaches back, far back into the time of his easier existence, his merely animal existence, when he was not aware of problems and difficulties, not conscious of questions to be answered and achievements to be attained — a time when he could *not* look behind and before and be afraid. For when man had no mentality he could have no perplexity; when he had no spirituality, he could feel no need of moral effort. So he reaches back, back to his animal existence, back before the dawn of his human consciousness, back before it was demanded of him that he share the shaping of his own destiny, and he idealizes that vague and shapeless memory. He peoples it with gods and supernatural beings. He turns it into a dream of bliss and a vision of contentment. Then he becomes nostalgic for it. The emotional drag of the past pulls him backwards. That is the psychological basis for imagined golden ages: the reluctance of man to maintain his effort, his endeavor; his reluctance, in fact, to be man at all. As he cannot help being man (his choice being to be that or nothing) he humanizes the ancient atavistic pull, idealizes, sentimentalizes, and in his weakness he gives himself over to nostalgia. He thinks it is a nostalgia to return to some elysium, some paradise, some heaven, but actually it is nostalgia to be back in the zoo!

If you think I am exaggerating, I must beg you to go into the matter for yourself. It is quite important. It is at the root of a great deal of our reluctance to reach the level of the challenges and opportunities which are pressing so hard upon us at the present time. We do not want to be fully human; it is too painful, too strenuous, too demanding and

too difficult. We want to go back — back to somewhere or something where life would be simpler and easier, back to some lower level, back where we hope we might feel adjusted and contented, back to a state of things we might call home.

Nor is this any the less true because it is mixed up with nobler aspirations. The nobler aspirations will be inoperative, nonfunctioning, until we have overcome their less noble counterparts — as, of course, they are now. Again and again, succeeding generations have welcomed the dream of a world of peace and brotherhood, but instead of working hard enough to get it they have united this dream emotionally with the backward pull of their nostalgia, and so have lost the power to bring it to fulfillment.

In conscious expression, this nostalgia is not always necessarily traced back to its origin. It can go back to the old-time religion, or the old-time nationalism, or the old-time anything else. It can go back to the wish for supernatural intervention, or salvationism. It can make a mother image out of the Virgin Mary — which is what the ancients used to do with their earth-goddesses, who were also always virgins and always mothers — or it can do something similar with Jesus of Nazareth. It can turn God into a deified image of human sentimentalism. Then there is no effort, no struggle to achieve the fully human level, just the realm of fantasy, of wishful thinking, which, if we keep on with it, will surely bring us to disaster. It will do so by robbing us of the moral force we need for the inescapable demands and tasks before us. We cannot meet the problems of our age unless we come to spiritual maturity.

I wish it were possible in this one sermon to apply this analysis to all the varieties of religion, the spiritual atti-

tudes, which are still persisting in the modern world. There is not time. I must concentrate the application where the need is greatest. I said a little while ago that our entire modern age is homesick. It is. Not in one, but in many ways.

Someone once said that the American will is in the skyscraper but the American mind is still in the colonial mansion. That is very largely true. It is equally true that the will of the whole Western world is very largely directed to a greater feat of architecture than a skyscraper. It is directed towards the architecture of a world community. But its mind is in the Gothic cathedral. When it escapes from that confinement it is homesick for it. It wants the God that — so it thinks — would make life easy for it, the God of the dream of the past.

This is the God of man's ancient imagining, the God of his nostalgia, the God he formed out of his own homesickness and his own fears, the God he made in his own image to stand between him and the dark. At long last, this God, this God of dreams and nightmares, of creeds and folklore, of heavens and hells, this imagined deity of the human race's childhood, has died. The traditional churches are trying to paint him back into lifelikeness, propping him up and standing behind him and making him gesture. But he's dead. Most of the modern world knows it, at any rate, at heart. And so, as Miss Edna St. Vincent Millay says in her *Conversation at Midnight*, it goes out and mourns over his grave.

Let me tell you, dear friends, and for the sake of some of you, as kindly as I can: this ancient God, the God of miracles and interventions, of revelations and salvations, of tyranny and sentimentalisms, is really dead. There is no

longer any kindness in letting anyone cling to such a fantasy. For if that is where we put our faith, our dependence, our reliance, we shall be wiped off the face of the earth. No fiction, however comforting, can guide us through our present perils; no fantasy can save us. Do not think that I have no compassion for the homesickness of modern man. I am a modern man myself, one brought up to a traditional faith, who knows through intimate and painful experience just what nostalgia in religion is. I carry with me the scars of conflict, just as others of you do, and some of these scars may never altogether heal. But I am not sure how much compassion we can afford — even for heartsick longing, even for homesickness which pours its anguish into the soul. Since we are all involved, such compassion would be self-pity. We cannot be self-pitying and at the same time strive to be spiritually mature. We must reckon with reality, the reality of what we must meet and master, and the reality of what we have with which to do it. Yes, of what we have with which to do it.

What have we? Let me tell you a story. Some years ago I took the marriage of a fine young man and a very lovely bride. It was a marriage that gave every promise of success. After a few weeks, however, the young wife came to see me. She loved her husband, she said, loved him tremendously; he was "wonderful" — that was the word she kept using — but she wanted to go back home. She was homesick, terribly homesick. She didn't want to be, but she just couldn't help it. What could she do? she asked. What would happen to her marriage if she went back home? Well, we talked for some time. I tried to restore the picture of home to its true proportions. I tried to put her marriage in a clearer light. I didn't talk much; I kept her talking, and

presently I began to see the picture rather clearly. "Why," I said, "you are all wrong about yourself. It's just that after the excitement of getting married you have now come to the point of emotional transition. You are not homesick for the past at all. You may not know it, but you are homesick for the future. You are not longing for the home you have left. You are impatient for the home you are going to make." And when I christened her baby, a year or so after, she whispered to me, "You were right. I was homesick for the future."

That is what we all are. There never was a golden age, but there's going to be one. We have been mistaken — all except the prophets and the pioneers. We have misguidedly referred to the past the vision of the future. We have projected *out* of our world what we must cause to come true *in* our world. We are nostalgic for something that never was, but which surely shall be; we are homesick not for a home we have left, but for one we are going to make . . . We? Yes, we — or, if we fail, those who come after us — for that is the requirement.

Let us get it very clear: in our immaturity, in the childhood of our race, we mistook our longing for a better world for something that belonged to the past — a golden age behind us. We have done this, in one way or another, ever since — all except the prophets and the pioneers — but the better world is in the future, waiting to be made.

Let me say something more. The only God who ever lived is living still. Not only living, but living intensely, living tremendously. Someone asked me the other day whether when I used such words I meant them merely as a symbol or as reality. All words are symbols, but I mean them as reality. I mean there is a power, a spirit, a pres-

ence far beyond our intellectual grasp but utterly alive in human minds, awake in human hearts, and moving us onward to our own fulfillment; a presence which requires that we, ourselves, decide our fate, take up and manifest the glory and the burden of our own humanity, a humanity which mounts, and must, towards divinity; a power and potency which breathes its claims, and always has, into the life of every age, the advance of every phase of history. This, I say, is the only God who ever was. All else is fantasy. This is the God who now is and the God of the ever-onward, ever-forward, ever-marching future. This is the God of conscience, the God who cannot yield to anything that conscience hates. This is the God of the loving heart, the God who needs and will not lessen nor relinquish anything that asks for human brotherhood.

The homesickness of this age, like all its maladies, will never yield to treatment of its surface symptoms. We shall be nostalgic for the past, the unreal and delusive past, until we surrender to the vision of the future. We shall weep for the god who never was until we accept the God who forever is. We shall be strangers always, and lonely and forlorn, until we build the home we long for. We shall lose the world and everything that's in it, until we find our souls.

What Is a Good Character Today?

STANDARDS of personal excellence have greatly changed in the last half-century. What Mr. Walter Lippmann calls the "acids of modernity" have eaten away the confidence of most of us that Victorian virtues deserve the valuation which the nineteenth century placed upon them. Some of us are disdainful of those virtues, others nostalgic for them, but hardly anyone expects them to regain their former bloom and vigor. Whether we have begun to achieve a new morality is perhaps a matter open to considerable question, but there is not much question about the widespread disavowal of the old one.

There is now, we are told, a new and liberated outlook on life and this has superseded the older ones. It is a more rational outlook, an unsentimental outlook, an accommodation of life to what are called "realities." This newer outlook has not emerged altogether because of a considered or deliberate intention; it has resulted from the growth of industrial civilization, from the new knowledge, from the effects of war and the disillusionments of peace. While some of the changes have been mere lapses, a falling away from earlier standards, others are more vital and aggressive. There are new idealisms, new moral purposes, new tests of achieve-

ment and worthiness, and these have had a share in eclipsing and expelling the old.

Perhaps the most useful way of pursuing the question, since we cannot hope to cover it entirely, is to limit ourselves for the time being to the more practical level of discussion. Let us ask, first of all, what *was* a good character, say fifty years ago? Well, if we are to believe the reports transmitted to us, it was something pretty definite. Its basis was piety. According to a dictionary of the period, piety is "an affectionate reverence for the Supreme Being and for parents and friends." It might have gone on to say that to maintain this affectionate reverence (and all of which it was the necessary nurture) regular religious exercises were required. These exercises were not necessarily a pleasure or a joy, but they *were* a constraining influence and a discipline. They reminded people that the Supreme Being was keeping an eye on them, and that he had certain definite expectations which it was desirable to meet. If the Supreme Being chanced to be a little slow in imposing his demands, one's parents and friends could be relied upon to act as proxies for him. They, together with all persons of authority, were the Supreme Being's resourceful and energetic agents, properly accredited for all disciplinary purposes.

Of course, this rigor was not always stark; it was often clothed with sentiment. There was the sentiment of home and filial affection, something which conditioned you as a child and maintained its influence throughout your life. There was the sentiment of a loving God who hated to be as harsh with people as he had to be. A very great deal of sentiment was built up in connection with piety, and the naturally pious — so called — rejoiced in it. The others

did their best to like it, but in any case had to accept it. It was rooted, as we have already indicated, in religious authority, very largely in the authority of a book: the Bible. And this book was much read, not only in churches but in homes. It was learned from the Bible as no other lesson was ever learned, that good behavior brought rewards, and sin, punishment. In the molding of character, no influence was more potent than the influence of this piety. And I need hardly say that today it has all but disappeared. Here and there, you find it as a residue — usually a much diluted residue — but in the modern world as a whole, the Western world, its day of dominance is gone.

What were the virtues nurtured by this piety and fashioned into character? *First, honesty.* Not a complete honesty, of course. That is one of the modern complaints about it. It was not necessarily intellectual honesty. It could hold on to beliefs which a truly honest mind would be forced to reject. It was not even complete personal candor. It did not exclude a generous measure of hypocrisy. People were not supposed to probe too deeply into their inner conflicts — except in approved ways and in authorized areas. Yet it was a rugged honesty just the same. Small but solid. You told the truth fifty years ago, even when a lie would have saved you a lot of trouble. You were honest in your business affairs. Not in a fundamental way, of course; not necessarily that. Honesty did not compel you to examine your business transactions to discover their effect upon the general welfare, but you were honest in your bookkeeping, in paying your bills, in not spending money before you got it, in not undertaking obligations you could not fulfill. You were honest also in undertakings you made on behalf of others. And people who did not live up to this kind of honesty were

soon outside the pale — unless their transactions were exceedingly large, in which case, of course, it was believed that God must be rewarding a combination of genius and industry, and the appropriate thing to do was to applaud the successful man as a national hero and lay plans to turn him into a famous and useful philanthropist. You were honest in the sense that it was wrong to steal a dime but not necessarily wrong to steal a railroad. You must not embezzle to the disadvantage of your client or your partner, but it might be all right to plunder a municipality or to try to steal the United States.

I am trying to present a balanced view of this kind of honesty, as you can see. But I want to make it perfectly clear that, within its own range, it was substantial, and enabled those who practiced it to hold their heads up in the world and feel a proper sense of self-esteem. Today, we insist upon a far more searching kind of honesty, and upon its being given a wider application, but I am sometimes afraid that we cover so much area with so little of the genuine article that it falls short of its purpose, like paint that has been spread too thin.

The *second* quality of character which was insisted upon half a century ago was *diligence*. What you did you were required to do thoroughly, and preferably by the most difficult method. You learned nothing in "ten easy lessons." It would have been regarded as sinful to try. You were diligent in the sense of thoroughness, of carefulness, of completing whatever you undertook. If you were slow at school, it was because *you* were dull, not the teacher. If you were superficial, it was because you were lazy, not because you were neurotic.

There is still diligence in the world, of course, but I

wonder whether there is as much of it. I do not see how we are to think our way or work our way through the critical times before us unless we can regain some of the diligence we have lost. There is too much careless thought, too much fluent chatter. Wit has come to be more highly regarded than wisdom. With all our new methods, we do not turn out many really educated people. A majority of our colleges are really semi-academic country clubs or backgrounds for a football team. Most students are smatterers; they have a smattering of many things, a true grasp of none — except in technological fields. Many teachers are spatterers. They do not communicate learning, they spray it. And indeed, the world is full of smatterers and spatterers, which is a part of the reason for our sorry condition. A good character today would contain the habit of diligence and would possess the fortitude to practice it.

Industry was a *third* essential of character fifty years ago. Industry not merely because there was work to be done, but industry because moral health required it. If you did nothing, you were worth nothing. When your workaday business was done, it was your obligation to go about doing good. And anyway, you had to be doing something. Fifty years ago, you expected to work, the men to make money, the women to make pincushions and antimacassars — if there was no harder work to be done. It is hardly to be doubted that this attitude to life greatly exaggerated the virtue of work. Today we want time to live; we expect to live not only *in* our work, but apart from it. The old hymn used to say:

“The common round, the daily task
Will furnish all we ought to ask,
Room to deny ourselves, a road
To bring us daily nearer God.”

We reject that glorification of drudgery. The common round does *not* furnish all we ought to ask. Self-denial is important when there is a sufficient reason, but self-denial for its own sake is an annulment of life. In the receptive sense, if not in the active, we desire cultural enrichment. We do not believe that life and work are one. It cannot be denied, I think, that this is a more enlightened attitude. Continuous drudgery is not an essential condition for good character; and it should not be. Excessive industriousness can be obsessional. The modern attitude is surely better. Yet, it would be blind not to notice that too many of us have become — shall I say — allergic to work, especially sustained work. We want success to come easily. We want to dream ourselves into prosperity, or agitate ourselves into it. We do not want to *work* ourselves into it. Sound character will repudiate the exaggerations of the past; but will not sound character want to remedy the indulgence of the present?

I cannot mention, of course, all the qualities of a good character of fifty years ago, but I shall have indicated what is needful, perhaps, if I mention just one or two more. *Sobriety* was such a quality. I do not mean sobriety in the sense of not being intoxicated by an alcoholic beverage. People were just as much intoxicated by the fervor of evangelistic meetings as they could possibly have been by “the demon, rum.” And on the whole, it is somewhat better to be drunk on alcohol than “three seas over” on a false religion. It is indeed a sad spectacle to see a petty reformer inebriated by his own self-righteousness and drunk on his own eloquence.

By *sobriety*, however, I do not mean abstention from this sort of thing. I mean a sober outlook on life and a sober way of living it. A half-century ago, pleasure for its own

sake was frowned upon. Those who sought it were believed to show weakness of character. Only the "fast set" enjoyed themselves with an easy conscience, and they were supposed, in any case, to come to a bad end. If not in this world, then certainly in the next. Love of pleasure was believed to be enfeebling. The circumspect avoided it. If pleasure crept in unawares, it was a sin to be repented of. And of course, it did creep in unawares. We all know the saying, I suppose, that the New England conscience never stopped a New Englander from sinning, but only from enjoying it. And, of course, it is pertinent to a much larger area than New England.

Well, half a century ago, pleasure was frowned upon. So was passion. It was considered best not to admit that passion existed, to pretend that it was not there, or if this proved too difficult, then to be contemptuous of it and to take as little notice of it as might be possible. In the young and in women of all ages, the state of mind this induced was called "innocence." Innocence was supposed to be a splendid thing to have, a grace of character, a thing of beauty. Unfortunately, however, it was highly precarious, and the path from innocence to repentance, even fifty years ago, was often dramatically short.

Well, we have come a long way from that attitude — both to pleasure and to passion. No one can say that we have always had a good sense of direction while traveling that way — or that we have one now. In many ways, our present situation is rather pitiful and far from creditable. We have followed pleasure in such a way as to enervate our minds and debilitate our sense of responsibility. We have followed passion pretty close to the garbage can and thrown a great deal of its beauty away. Too many people have brought me

their sad stories, and for too many years, for me not to know how often and how easily the modern pleasure addict and the modern philanderer lose their way. They free their passions but they do not find joy, they do not find beauty, they are not fulfilled. They give themselves up to pleasure only to become jaded in appetite before they get out of their twenties. They vulgarize and debase all that might fill their lives with wonder. A great many people incapacitate themselves for intense emotion and become capable only of fever. All this we must write off on the side of loss.

But we know, too, that the former way was life-denying, fear-ridden, obsessional. A good character today would not seek "innocence" or repression for its own sake; a good character today would seek to channel its emotional force towards maturity, towards completion and balance, towards responsibility and insight. It would not transgress the laws of beauty or empty out the sacredness of wonder, or be content to be imprisoned a little below the truly human level.

Well, as we consider this partial summary of good character half a century ago, how do we feel about it? Some of it was stifling, oppressive, stuffy. A good deal of it was unreal, hypocritical, self-defeating. But there was also self-control and strength in it; and a restraint which often brought an increase of power. Nor must we forget that there was kindness, then as now; perhaps greater kindness. There was courtesy: the thoughtful consideration of others. I cannot list all the qualities. I can only suggest the outline, and try to do it as fairly as I can. But what we cannot escape in the whole matter is the fact that external authority — the authority which largely imposed this pattern of the past — is gone. We cannot revive it even if we would. We are not able to believe in piety; we dislike even the word. We can-

not give ourselves with any enthusiasm or sincerity to the religious exercises which might promote that sort of piety. Our church attendance is less and less based upon it. And those who have given up church attendance would not renew it upon such a basis.

Religion must revise its former basis, improve upon it, before we are interested in religious nurture. We know that there is a great deal lacking in modern character, but we do not expect to supply very much of it from the past. Authority must come from the living conscience, it must emerge in the present, it must justify itself in reason, it must speak in ways that we understand, it must persuade us.

It begins to be urgent, however, that this newer approach be more effective. We know that we are not doing much better for our own children than the Victorians did for theirs. If we cannot mold character in the young by quoting from the Bible, neither do we mold it very well by leaving it to the radio and the comic strips. Or by giving voice occasionally to our own very tentative parental wisdom. Some of the young people are just as disgusted with the characters of modern grownups as the grownups are with Victorian character.

We are rather tired of the fraudulent way in which we talk of "personality" instead of "character." Personality without moral worth. Personality valued only for attractiveness or impressiveness. We are not very proud that such a book as *How to Win Friends and Influence People* has sold hundreds of thousands of copies. What it really means is that multitudes of people want to know how to glitter, how to be glib, how to be a sow's ear and look like a silk purse, how to use people for your own benefit, how to be a fascinating conversationalist though your mental rating is close to

ceiling zero — and how to make money while being all these things. "Personality," yes; but not character. How to have "oomph," or seem as though you have it. How to have "it" — that used to be the word: "it." And so we have been more interested in "oomphiness" and "itiness" than in wholesomeness and righteousness. "How can I be charming, irresistible, in spite of being so self-centered that I am a complete bore? How, without the trouble of really learning anything, can I contrive to sound wise? How can I acquire, painlessly, in outline, the sum of all knowledge, in twelve months on fifteen minutes a day? How can I burst into a room so as to seem to fill it?" Yes, of all this, more and more people — I do not say all, I only say more — are growing weary. Too few times do we hear it said of anybody, "He is a splendid character." We only hear, "He has a marvelous personality." It is all very shabby, very shoddy, very fraudulent — and now it is becoming very tiresome.

What is a good character today? A good character today is based upon honesty that runs right through life — an individual's own life and the life of the world. Not the cheap kind of honesty which is merely a clean window looking out upon a dirty alley. Not the honesty which debunks only to destroy and abandon. But the honesty that makes a mind reckon with facts, that sheds the light of day upon every kind of prejudice, that considers the welfare of all mankind and not just the paltry virtue of not cheating on small change. This kind of honesty will face a man with himself plainly, clearly, unmasked, without excuse and without indulgence. It will face him with the right of the world, the right of his community, the right of every segment of human life of which he is a part, to be considered, to be upheld in his conscience. This honesty will deny him

all solace, all serenity, all self-esteem, until he ceases to think selfishly, sectionally, provincially — and thinks universally. It will require his behavior to follow his thought. It will mix his honest thinking with his honest living. And these standards will apply to all vocations.

There are no ivory towers any more, and there never will be. Scientists used to consider that their integrity was required only in their researches, that their responsibility ended at the laboratory door. Today they have learned with devastating suddenness that scientists must be citizens, that their integrity must reach to the ends of the earth, that their responsibility is as large as human life itself. So must it be with all of us. A character is no longer really good that stops short of the universal claim upon it.

Nor is it good if its love, its concern, its kindness is limited to family, or social group, or even nation. That seemed enough once; it is enough no longer. Two thousand years ago some people brought the mother of Jesus to speak with him, to admonish him, in fact. But Jesus was talking to a great multitude of people. And he turned to those who had interrupted him and spoke what must have sounded very strange words: "These," he said, indicating the multitude, "these are my mother, my sisters and my brethren." Well, it was prophetic then. Only a spiritual genius could rise to it. Now it is a practical necessity. I do not mean that it is a necessity that we should forsake our loyalties to family, to friends, to homeland. But it is a necessity that we transcend them. That we carry the same loyalties increasingly towards the universal. Our neighbor whom we must love as we love ourselves is anyone whatever and everyone whatever throughout the world. A good character today cannot be narrow in its affections or limited in the outreach of its

benevolence. A good character today must secede from parochialism, from provincialism, from nationalism. Once again, a good character must be molded by the universal.

Its diligence, its industry, must be devoted to the great ideals, the great purposes of the age. Its sobriety must cease to be the small and shallow virtue that it used to be, and must become a scrupulous and ever-deepening recognition of responsibility. All pleasure, all passion, all joy, must be sought as part of life's advancing fulfillment, life's growing sacredness, life's unfolding beauty. Restraint must come from the sense of life's wholeness, against which no lesser thing may rebel, and from responsibility and obligation to all others, and in the intensification of a universal human loyalty, and for the liberation of strength to serve. Personal life must take its quality and reinforce its fidelities from the greatness of the ideals it serves; it must impose upon itself its own severities to set it free to its own high worship, to give it courage for its own exalted pilgrimage, to make it worthy of the truth it seeks, and of its quest for righteousness and beauty, and of the mystery of the holy, hidden in the heart of life, and of the only living God. Its hardihood may come to be a smiling hardihood, gay with the sureness of a bold adventure. But there must be no doubt about the hardihood.

There will be no faith where there is no fortitude, no truth where there is no candor, no joy where there is no discipline, no achievement where there is no diligence. The inner core of substance in the virtues of the past remains essential for the present and the future. But the range must be larger, the vision clearer, the purpose greater.

No man of small virtues, however intact and perfect, can lay claim to a good character today. If choice were necessary, it would be better to have the greater virtues and

lose the lesser, rather than possess the lesser, no matter how inviolate, and lose the greater. "Look at the Scribes and Pharisees," said Jesus. "They strain out gnats and swallow camels. Your virtue must exceed theirs."

Let us be done with the notion that religion is confined to petty pieties and small constraints. All too often men who have possessed these pieties have wrought great evil. If you put your family before yourself and at the same time put national pride before human welfare, your character is not good and your virtue is not effectual. If you are a non-gambler and a teetotaler and at the same time put the rights of property before the rights of man, it might be better if you gambled recklessly and courted dipsomania if such a course could leave you loyal to the principles of social righteousness and humanitarian justice. Tom Paine was a hardened drinker — it is not known whether he gambled — but he, more than anyone, more perhaps even than Washington, saved the American Revolution, the revolution of the Rights of Man. I should mention perhaps that he drank not because he was a common drunkard, but because his perception was so much sharper than the average that it overwhelmed him with the sight of all the treachery and stupidity around him, and from time to time he drowned in drink the shame and sorrow of it. I do not want you to think I am suggesting abandoning the lesser virtues. Before you go out and get drunk, make certain you have the talent of Tom Paine and save a revolution or two to prove it.

No, I am not suggesting that the lesser virtues are not virtuous. Sometimes they are, sometimes they are not. What I am suggesting is that they are lesser, and we ought to reach out beyond them — to the greater. The thin-lipped virtues may have their place — I do not stop to question it

— but what they add up to is something less than goodness and considerably less than character. What I am saying is that if you don't swear, don't cheat, don't lie, don't gamble, don't lose your temper, don't transgress any of these meritorious prohibitions and proscriptions, and yet refuse the claim of the world for brotherhood, the cry for a universal, just community, it would be better if you cheated, lied, and all the rest and still had room for the great claims, the great purposes of your age. What I am saying is that if you never listen to a dirty story but you do listen to race prejudice, you are far from pure. You are straining out the gnat and swallowing the camel. What I am saying is that petty pieties and paltry virtues are all too often a cloak, a mask, with which great sins are falsely compensated and disguised.

You cannot have a good character today and at the same time have a small mind and a little heart. You cannot have a good character today and be merely a petty reformer. A good character today is shaped by greatness, greatness in vision, greatness in courage, greatness in insight, greatness in purpose and devotion. Without this greatness, all the lesser things will soon be swept away. Let, therefore, the winds of God blow through our lives and sweep away all littleness, all triviality, all mean and narrow aims. And in lives swept open to the true, the limitless, the universal, may there be room at last for the courage and compassion of the infinite, for the joy and tenderness of life's lovelier, holier spirit, for the power and the wonder of God.

A Prayer for Unforgiveness

EVER since man became aware of himself as a being capable both of good and evil, he has been burdened with a sense of guilt. To get rid of this burden, he has labored long and painfully and put forth his utmost exertions, yet, strange as it may seem, very little of this labor has been directed towards removing the *cause* of his guiltiness; almost all of it has been concerned with banishing the guilty *feeling*. What man has wanted is not an end of evil-doing so much as absolution from responsibility. He has wanted to go on doing wrong without feeling too distressed about it. He has wanted to repent without making genuine restitution, to feel remorse without making amends, to be forgiven without reforming his behavior. If he has wanted to do a little better than this, he has wanted it more as an elevation of his mood than as an actual aim or purpose.

Consequently, he has provided himself with elaborate systems of belief and ritual, all of which facilitate persistence in the paths of evil while relieving the wrongdoer, at frequent and convenient intervals, of any personal accountability. God (so he tells himself), being infinite in mercy, knows the weakness of the human heart. He hates the evil

but loves the evildoer — and thus, the guilt is cancelled; God forgives.

This is the modern version, or, perhaps more accurately, one of the simplest of the modern versions, but it has a venerable history. Let us take a glance at it.

Our primitive ancestors were concerned not only with the wrongs men did to one another, but with trespasses against the gods, and as the gods were tyrannous and temperamental, a trespass could be anything that might be thought to fret them or antagonize them. This meant that a mere error in a ritual observance might threaten graver consequences than the murder of a friend. It was necessary to placate the gods not merely when a genuine wrong was done, but also when a ceremony was badly handled or when the gods, for unknown reasons, had decided to be wrathful or annoyed. Since, therefore, the cause of guilt might be irrational, so might the cure. Just as a tribal chief could change his attitude if the guilty one appeased him with a present, or bowed and scraped and threw himself upon his mercy, so might the gods, for the gods were largely modeled on the tribal chiefs.

Very unfortunately, this primitive confusion has persisted through one phase after another through all the ages of the evolution of religion. It has done so, of course, through many changes and refinements, and at many levels and in a great variety of ways. It is not always easy to recognize it. We cannot stop just now to trace its progress; suffice it to say that it has been responsible for many of the features of salvationism — of doctrines and rituals of atonement. Where these doctrines prevail, their fundamental thesis is that man has sinned so totally, so finally, that nothing he himself can do can save him. Evil has claimed him for its

own. Therefore, God must step in — a God, by now, of loftier moral standards — but, as God cannot condone evil or accept the situation as it is, justice must be done. There must be retribution, a penalty, an expiation, and so God provides a savior, a being who takes upon himself the burden of the sins of all humanity. The sufferings of this savior atone for all the evil in the world, past, present and future, and man, without making the moral effort it would take for him to reconstruct his life, is very largely released from his guilt and discharged from his responsibility. I say “very largely” because I recognize that such religions do invite improvement in the moral level. They are not unethical — far from it. They are usually accompanied by teachings that inspire considerable striving for a better way of life, considerable aspiration and endeavor.

But the fatal flaw is this: after holding up a worthy standard of motive and behavior, they provide a way of escape from it. Whether through a priest or otherwise, they afford the means of lessening the very guilt that might, if left alone, compel reform. They lighten the feeling of responsibility. They say that, after all, man by his very nature is so sinful that all he can do is to throw himself upon the mercy of God. They make it possible to go on living in an evil world without being so overwhelmed by *accountability* for it — accountability for such a full share in it that a truly moral person would be forced to try to change it. Instead of that, the adherent of these religions, in spite of high ethical standards, is able to absolve himself, to accept things as they are, to accept himself as he is, and to condone the wrongs he might remove and the evils he might remedy.

I do not say that this is what is openly intended. I do not even say that it is ever really wittingly desired. What I

do say is that this is the way it turns out. It does so partly because of confusion and insufficiency, but also because the mind of man is infinitely subtle and because his heart is full of guile. He covers his treachery with finely woven webs of superstition. He says his helplessness only shows more clearly the need of God. He seldom allows himself to catch more than a glimpse of the baseness of his aims.

When we come to more enlightened people, to those who count themselves emancipated, to those who have abandoned superstitions — that is to say, when we come to *ourselves!* — the matter is, of course, entirely different! *Is it?* How I wish it were! What do *you* seek, dear friend? What do you seek from religion? If you do not call it forgiveness, if you do not speak of absolution, if you prefer to mention uplifting experience, or solace, or inward serenity, or peace of mind, does it not amount to the same thing? Upon what terms do you expect to get this peace of mind? Is it by reckoning with your conscience? Or is it by escaping from the sins of the world which you condone, the wrongs to which you are resigned, the evils you do not wish to challenge? Is it not some aesthetic experience, some vision of distant glories, some compensation of the spirit for life's everyday sordidness? Is it not relief, release, assuagement, that you look for?

Is it not in short some communion with life's mystery, with the ampler, fuller, holier life beyond you? with God? Whether or not you pray for forgiveness, it is forgiveness you seek. Whether you believe in God, or only in the obscure and nameless, you want to be harmonious within yourself, yet what are the terms upon which you want it? Is it anything more — all this — than a refinement of the ancient craving, the craving for relief from guilt, for forgive-

ness? Is it not psychologically at least, another form of salvationism?

Let us get it down to bare essentials. From our viewpoint today, the presence or absence of superstition is secondary. What is it that the primitive desired? What does the salvationist want? Is it not an *emotional* state in which the tensions, the self-accusations, the moral anxieties, are gone? More than this was sought, no doubt, but let us keep to the elements which are constant, the common denominators which are always there. This *is* the emotional state that was sought for. The difference is largely one of imagery; petty deities and demonic forces in one case, saviors and satans in another; rewards and punishments, heavens, hells and purgatories — yes, these were there. But deep beneath it all was the hunger for inner absolution, for removal of guilt, for self-harmony, for harmony with the mysterious but morally compelling, for harmony with God.

And this is still what is sought. We can put it in a sentence. It makes little difference whether the sentence becomes a conscious prayer or not. It is in the soul. "*O God, let me off! From the world and my share in its evil, let me off. From the claims injustice makes upon me, let me off. From the call for brotherhood, for equal rights for all mankind, for honest dealings with the world's afflicted, let me off. For all the evil I condone, all the sins to which I am resigned, O God, forgive me. I will make a token payment. I will be kind. I will be merciful. I will do many small good deeds. But be thou merciful! For thou knowest how weak I am; thou knowest the frailty of the human heart, and yet the hunger in it — the hunger and the thirst. O God, I am not sufficient for these things. Let me off.*"

It is as modern as that — *and as unemancipated*. If you

think you can escape inclusion by saying you do not pray to God, that you would not use such terms, I will translate it into your own. Spoken or unspoken, this is the wish: "O Life, let me off. O claim of this age upon me, let me be excused. Joy of life, poise of mind, self-esteem, come tarry with me. I open all my doors but one: the door of conscience. Overlook it! Overlook it, life! Overlook it, world! Overlook it, reality of the mind and heart in which I live. Overlook it! Let me off!" . . . Only the vocabulary is different: the prayer is one and the same.

So I say that the same old ancient trick is still prevailing. We want to get rid of the feeling of guilt — not the *cause* of it, the *feeling* of it — and we want to get rid of it cheaply. We want God to compound our felonies and abet our self-betrays. For a long time the stratagem succeeded; for ages upon ages the trick has worked. It will not work much longer. The time has come to pray for *unforgiveness*. The world is dangerous, the time is short, the claim is inescapable. We cannot lose our guilt — we never shall again — until we set ourselves towards the eradication of its cause.

Let us be clear about it. The laws that govern history are just as relentless as the laws that govern electricity. They always have been. So are all the laws that govern human life. It is useless to pray to electrical energy to excuse you from the penalties of throwing the wrong switch. Natural laws make no exceptions. The moral law is a natural law. It is a law of life at the human level, not as fixed as certain physical laws, because it is based upon the laws of growth, but just as inexorable. It cannot be relaxed by sentiment. Its severities are never tempered by regret. Neither men nor nations can escape its judgments. In the

final sense, they never could. As the Bible puts it, at the level of its pure, prophetic insights, the level not of its theology but of its moral best: If you sow the wind, you will reap the whirlwind. That has always been true. It is more true now than ever.

At the present culminating hour in human destinies, even the semblance of escape will soon be unavailable. What we must pray for is unforgiveness — the utter absence of relief from guilt until we have attacked the causes which produce it.

If anyone should say, "Are we mistaken, then, in thinking that love is the law of life? that God is love?" the answer is that we are not mistaken; we are only confused. Love is not a sentiment, a mere indulgence, a tender softness towards all things, good or evil. Genuine love, creative love, is the most demanding thing in the world. It will not relax its standards — will not because it cannot. If it did so, it would degrade itself and thereby become something less than love.

What would the love of God be if our prejudices, our selfishness, our indolence, our callousness were all condoned? In a world where some feast while others starve, where race dominates race, where human brotherhood is daily proclaimed and hourly betrayed, what would the law of love be if it did not demand an end of evil, of gross injustice, of arrogance, of selfishness? How can God love the needy and oppressed and indulge the greedy and oppressive? No, the love of God is not the indulgence of a mother to a corrupt and wayward child. The love of God is the most exacting thing in the universe. It can excuse nothing that falls below its standard; it can indulge nothing that sinks below its claim. Let us have done with hypocrisy. God's

love is not and never will be the mere reflection of our self-indulgence, the littleness of human hearts writ large. God's love is the most unyielding thing in the world; if it were otherwise, it would not be God's love. There is no forgiveness anywhere for what conscience cries out against. There cannot be. God cannot forgive until we have erased the cause of guilt — until, in the light of honest day, we can forgive ourselves.

Let us put such matters in their right proportion. As a day-to-day solvent in human relationships, forgiveness is a virtue and a need. As the emotional impulse behind an act of comprehension, the comprehension of the weakness of another because it might easily have been our own, forgiveness is a worthy thing. In mature people it should be habitual. It should hardly stop to call itself forgiveness. As Jesus said, in this context, you forgive your brother not seven times, but seventy times seven — you go beyond enumeration. This is the natural consequence of a broad humanity. It applies in the area proper to it. It can also rise to higher levels—it was Jesus who said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do"—but it does not apply beyond its natural scale. The forgiveness of Jesus did not prevent the fall of Jerusalem, which he had grimly prophesied, nor did it make his crucifiers other than they were, or save them from the penalties of hate and prejudice. It did not do so because it could not do so. Forgiveness cannot suspend the moral law. It cannot do so for individuals; it cannot do so for nations.

Therefore, I say again, it is time we learned to pray for unforgiveness. The greatest hope remaining to the nations is that their guilt will goad them to a new allegiance

to their higher aims, that they may solve their problems not in terms of national interest (that same old transgression of the moral law of nations which has brought disaster piled upon disaster) but in terms of world community. Otherwise there will be no forgiveness, no evasion of penalty, no escape.

I want to bring this thought down to the individual, too. I am not attempting to expound it exhaustively. It has too many applications. I merely want to leave it as a troublesome thought in your minds, one you will have to work out for yourselves, and if the demands it makes upon you are as heavy as those it makes upon me I can offer you a little (but not too much) sympathy. This is the level mankind of this age must reach — the level where it asks not for escape, not for solace, but for unforgiveness; the level where it is ready to bear the guilt until the cause of guilt has been removed.

It has been said, not once but many times, and not by preachers only but by those who make no profession of religion, that this entire age is haunted and beset by an accusing conscience. Therein is its promise. I have been told that, in the recent war, aviation mechanics often felt guilty towards the men who flew the bombing planes. They took a greater risk. The crews of the bombing planes felt guilty towards the pilots of the fighting planes who protected them. They took a greater risk. The fighters who returned felt guilty towards those who did not come back. Perhaps they had taken a greater risk. . . . It is well that this is so. It is well that every one of us should feel the guilt of what he owes to others, to those who bear the heavier burdens or suffer the weightier oppressions or, on our behalf, accept the greater risks.

It is well for me, when I see the Washington slums in which my Negro fellow citizens must live, that I feel a sense

of guilt when I return to this lovely church, or to the comfortable house in which I live. It is well for me if I pray God not to forgive me — never to forgive me — until I have done all one man can do to change such evils. It is the same with every other claim upon my conscience, claims near, claims far. Believe me, dear friend, it is also well for you.

Unless you wish to be a spiritual impostor, relying upon a fraudulent conscience, and begging for what you do not deserve; unless you wish to be forever tormented and uneasy, forever repressing the truth you do not dare to face; unless you wish to lose your peace of mind, to lose it and deserve to lose it, your feeling of guilt is your hope and promise, God's gift for the true salvation of your soul.

There *is* a peace, there *is* a beauty, there *is* a joy, a matchless joy, in religion, but there is only one gateway by which it can reach the soul, reach it honestly and never fear to be expelled — the gateway of conscience. When this gate is open, there is room not only for the messengers of duty, austere and martial in their unrelenting claim, but room for the panoply of all life's beauty, for the coming and the going of its great adventures, for the angels of its peace and for the glory of the ever-living God.

"Am I My Brother's Keeper?"

LET us look at this question first in its ancient context. It may illuminate the present quite surprisingly.

The words come, of course, from the well-known story in the Book of Genesis. Probably you had it read to you in Sunday school. Probably, too, the good teacher gave you a simple explanation of it, which may have run something like this: "Now Adam and Eve had two sons, the first named Cain and the second named Abel. And Abel, the second son, liked to keep sheep; he was a shepherd. But Cain, the first-born, tilled the ground; he was a farmer. At harvest-time, Cain remembered that he ought to make a sacrifice to God, in thankfulness for his abundant crops, and he did so. He took some of the fruits and some of the grain, just as people still do at harvest festivals and at Thanksgiving, and brought them to God. But God refused to have anything to do with them . . ." At this point, possibly, the teacher was interrupted by a brightly eager scholar who wanted to know how God indicated that he didn't want Cain's offerings. "Well," the teacher very likely said, "it was the custom to burn the sacrifices — to make 'burnt offerings,' as they were called — and when Cain burnt his sacrifice, the smoke refused to go up towards heaven, where God was, but just

rolled along the ground. Abel, however, made *his* offering from his flock of sheep and the smoke went up just as straight as a column of smoke possibly could and God received the offering."

When the teacher got this far, it was probable that the class was too engrossed in the story to ask captious questions. But if there *were* some persistently inquiring minds present, then questions were likely to come thick and fast. "Why didn't God like Cain's offering?" "Well," the teacher would say, "Cain was not a good man, as you will soon discover." "Yes," the inquiring mind might continue "but he had done nothing wrong down to then." "Well," the teacher would reply: "we don't know about that. Probably he had. People don't get as far as murder all in one jump!"

Or maybe the questions would take a whimsical turn: "Was God anti-vegetarian?" the youthful skeptic might inquire. "Why did he like burnt sheep better than burnt fruit?" To this the really subtle teacher would doubtless respond by embroidering the story the way the commentaries do, saying that Cain sacrificed only the worst of his crops whereas Abel undoubtedly offered up the best!

And so the point would be reached in the story at which God came in — and he came in very dramatically. For Cain, feeling bitter about his sacrifice being refused, beguiled Abel into the field and there slew him. Almost at once, Cain was confronted by Jehovah. "Where," asks God, "is your brother, Abel?" And Cain said: "I know not: Am I my brother's keeper?" Which, of course, was a bit of derisive repartee. "Am I," Cain was asking, "Abel's shepherd — as Abel is the shepherd of his sheep?" And Cain seemed to hope that God would be silenced by that. Why should one man be the shepherd of another man? Sheep were sheep and

had to be looked after, but men were men and should look out for themselves. As between one man and another, what responsibility was there? And what did God have to do with it? But God just went on looking very steadily at Cain. "The voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground! And now art thou accursed from the earth, which hath opened her mouth to receive thy brother's blood from thy hand. When thou tillest the ground, it shall not henceforth yield unto thee her strength; a fugitive and a vagabond shalt thou be in the earth."

Suddenly, all the mockery died out of Cain. This was a curse more terrible than he could bear. He began to beg for mercy. "I shall be driven out into the wilderness," he cried. "I shall be a fugitive. Everyone who finds me will try to kill me. Yes, and I shall be driven out of *your* sight, too; out of the sight of God. Do you really want *this* to happen to me?"

Cain's pleading seems to have softened Jehovah quite perceptibly. "I will put a mark on you," he says, "which will warn everybody who would attempt your life that a seven-fold vengeance will be visited upon him if he succeeds." And so Cain went out into the Land of Nod — which means the Land of Wandering. Presently however, and with startling inconsistency, we find him married and settled down, and the founder of a city!

That, probably, is the way you got the story in Sunday school. There may have been a little moralizing here and there, and a trifle of embellishment according to the taste and fancy of the teacher; but in substance, that is about how she told the story. And it is a very good way to tell such a story — particularly if you do not know any of the facts that tend to complicate it.

The truth is, however, that this is far from being a simple story. Perhaps you long ago suspected as much. You wondered why Cain should feel so bothered about other people’s killing him when, so far as the Genesis narrative was concerned, there was only his own family on the entire earth. Adam and Eve, his dead brother Abel, (Seth was still in the future) , and himself. And you wondered how he could build a city with such limited resources. His labor problem must have been terrific. You wondered how he populated his city. You wondered where he found a wife. . . .

Yes, you had your doubts about this story even when you first heard it. You rather liked it; you felt it ought to be respected, seeing that it was in the Bible, and you gave up thinking about it — which was a pity; for it is worth thinking about. It is worth taking up again. Let me take it up very briefly, now, in the context of a broader background and a more modern understanding. If you are unfamiliar with such matters, the result may astonish you.

We are dealing, of course, with religious folklore; that is to say, with ancient stories, the significance of which among other things, is not on the surface. This story probably took its present form not earlier than about 1000 years B.C. It must have passed through scores of transitions before the Bible editors who put it in the Book of Genesis gave it its present form. Unfortunately, we are not able to trace it through these transitions, as we can with certain other myths; but we *do* know what it is all about. Let me try to put it concisely.

Cain represents the beginning of agriculture, the coming of the time when men began to plant crops in the earth and take up a settled life on the land. He represents cities,

which became possible only after agriculture was established. Down to that time, the largest settlement economically supportable was an oasis or a tiny trading center. Cain therefore represents nothing less than civilization — a word which comes from the same root, of course, as the word “city.”

What, then, does Abel represent? Abel, as the keeper of sheep, represents the more primitive stage, the so-called nomadic stage, when human life was supported by driving flocks and herds from grassland to grassland, these flocks and herds being the tribal food supply.

As for God's place in the story, we must remember that in the evolution of all religions the god grows up with the people. All the myths, no matter where they come from, show this kind of growth. Jehovah was first of all a very primitive god, a nomadic god who lived with his tribes in the desert. Later — and it took a long time — he became a national god, and in the end a universal god. In this story, mixed up because it has been edited so many times, God is mostly still a nomadic god, but on his way towards civilization.

This god does not like sacrifices from crops and fruits. He is accustomed to sheep and goats. And so he does not accept Cain's offering. This part of the story comes, of course, from the lingering shepherd stage — which resisted agriculture and resented bitterly the coming of the cities and the beginning of civilization. The later part, when God softens towards Cain, comes from a subsequent interpolation in the story — an interpolation made after agriculture and the cities supported by it were more generally accepted. If you want to know how deep was the early repugnance to agriculture, you need only consider that in the story of the

Garden of Eden the curse pronounced upon Adam and Eve for their sins was that they should henceforth become agriculturists — farmers. They would "till the earth in the sweat of their brow." This, in the opinion of the writer, was just about the lowest thing that could happen to anybody. Or again, at innumerable places in the Old Testament, cities are regarded as inevitably sinful; hence the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah. Hence also, in part, the story of the Tower of Babel.

When Cain slays Abel, what is signified is the superseding of the earlier, nomadic stage, by the later farming, civilizing stage. Cain *invites* Abel into the field. (This is the correct translation.) And when Abel, the shepherd, gets into the field he ceases to be Abel, the shepherd, and becomes, no doubt, Abel, the farmer. His blood "sinks into the soil."

Yes, but as we said a few minutes ago, the story is confused and inconsistent. We must expect that, because many hands at many different times put it together. Consequently we read of Cain being sentenced to give up agriculture (which made cities and civilization possible) and become a wanderer again. Advancing civilization has overwhelmed the simpler life of earlier man, and so he must give it up. Yes, but if he does, less advanced people, more ferocious, more barbarous, will take advantage of his weakness and destroy him. No, says God, there will be a distinctive mark of civilization on Cain — the civilizer — a sign of something people will not in the end be willing to give up. Even barbarians will be attracted — in spite of also being repelled — by civilized arts and skills, (which, of course, has always been the case.) Cain will not be killed. He will be found

useful. A little further in the story, we find that this is corroborated; the curse is not final. Cain is not a wanderer after all; he is planting civilization again; he is founding new cities. "And Cain builded a city and called the name of the city after the name of his son, Enoch." Yes, his son! Civilization re-established in a new generation! And later still, we find that Enoch was a saint, a man of God — in spite of living in a city! Well, what does this do to the question we are chiefly concerned with? It transforms it. From being a simple storybook question, it suddenly takes shape as a tremendous issue, *propounded at the very beginning of civilization and still unsettled.*

"What," says God to Cain, the civilizer, "have you done with Abel?" What, in other words, has more civilized man done with his simpler, more dependent brother?

Do you doubt this interpretation of the passage? Then I will substantiate it. A few verses back at the beginning of the story, God asks Cain why he is so chagrined about the sacrifice that was refused. "If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door." In other words, "you are on your own; the choice and responsibility are yours." Then come these unmistakable words, "*And unto thee shall he [Abel] be subject, and thou shalt rule over him.*" This, of course, is absolutely inconsistent with the spirit of the rest of the story, of which Abel is the martyred hero, unless we understand it allegorically. Which is certainly how we should understand it. Abel, the primitive, is inevitably to be subject to the will of Cain, the more civilized.

And so God is saying to the privileged, more advanced, more civilized man, "Where is Abel? What have you done

with less privileged man? You have taken away his innocence, his simplicity; you have enslaved him; you have murdered him. His blood cries out to me from the ground!"

And the more civilized man replies with a shrug of his unbent shoulders, "Am I my brother's keeper? Should I treat my brother as though I were his shepherd? Am I responsible for him?"

Is civilization responsible for what goes on outside? Should the people of the great cities, the great civilizations, care about the people of the far places, the people outside? The cities are mighty, the people of the land are strong; they have become a nation, a great nation. They have even become an empire, trading with the far places. It may be — yes, of course, it *may* be — that in the far places my brotherman is bearing grievous burdens, his blood mingles with his sweat beneath the lash; he may be ill-treated; he may be murderously treated; but only what he produces is the concern of the civilizations and of the people of the great cities. I buy it for money. So far as I am concerned, the transaction is local. I cannot make the world outside my business. Nor is it my business if my brother, through his inferiority, is fitted only for enslavement in my fields; if he becomes my hewer of wood and drawer of water. It is the natural way of things. Am I responsible? Am I my brother's keeper?

Then comes the curse of God. "You shall be driven away from your cities; you shall be cast forth from your land; you shall be fugitives and vagabonds, living in the Land of Nod — the Land of Wandering."

Do I need to interpret this curse? How often has civilization been uprooted! How often have nations been driven forth! How often have cities been overthrown! Consider the

endless ruins in which the archaeologists dig — ruins of civilizations which were destroyed. Destroyed by whom? Destroyed by the more primitive, more barbaric peoples who were left outside. Destroyed by softness and decadence brought about through man's depending upon the unrequited labors of the burdened and enslaved. Destroyed because the privileged raised their eyebrows and shrugged their shoulders and said, "Am I my brother's keeper?" And thus, the people of the great civilizations become refugees, wanderers, fugitives and vagabonds — with a mark upon them, the mark of civilization but also the mark of murder, the mark of decadence, the mark of moral refusal. And the ancient effort had to begin all over again.

Yes, it is as old as that — and as modern. *That* is the story of Cain and Abel. Your Sunday school teacher may have sensed it but couldn't quite cope with what was at the threshold of her mind. You may have sensed it yourself — that there was more in this story than appears upon the surface. As soon as the clues are supplied, the interpretation is self-evident, isn't it? It is the whole story of man's relationship with man; the whole story of civilization and the ominous sin of omission that has always wrecked it. If you doubt it, ask yourself what overthrew Sumeria, Egypt, Babylon, Assyria, Athens, Macedonia and Rome. It is all in this story, all in this question: "Am I my brother's keeper?"

And what has our own civilization done to the outsider? What did *we* care how the raw materials of our industry were got? How our slaves, at home and abroad, were requited? What about such somber records as the bloody story of "red rubber"? Of the Belgian Congo? The Malay States? What about the African slave trade? We have a race problem today, an ever more and more serious race

problem in America, a race problem everywhere. Why? India would not fight against Japan. Why? The Malaysians helped the Japanese. Why? Do you lament the colored problem in America? Well, who brought the Negroes here? They certainly did not come in their own hollowed-out logs. They came in ships built in England and New England. They came to be compelled to till our fields. (Cain invited Abel into the field.) It is a long, long thought, isn’t it?

Yes, and who is won over — who, within our own civilization, is won over to the barbarians on the outside? Who is most readily attracted by barbarian propaganda — active and passive? Who but the privileged and decadent on the one hand and the underprivileged and embittered on the other? The followers of Hitler, in Germany and everywhere else, were composed almost exclusively of the decadents and the underprivileged. And the sins of civilization produce them both. The decadent who became so by being borne upon the backs of the underprivileged; and the underprivileged who became so because they must carry the decadent upon their backs. The sins of civilization — which all add up to one sin in the final reckoning: the sin of asking without permitting an answer: “Am I my brother’s keeper?” It is not that we have said, we are *not* our brother’s keeper. No, indeed! We have even talked about “the white man’s burden.” But we have *not* talked about who was carrying the burden of the white man. We have thought of the obligations of privilege — yes indeed, but we have not thought about *sharing* privileges. It is very interesting that the word “charity” once meant “love” and now it means giving away what you can easily do without. Am I my brother’s benefactor? Why certainly! Naturally! At any rate occasionally! Of course! Am I my brother’s keeper? Involved in his

miseries, concerned in his welfare? It is bad taste to dwell upon the disagreeable. Let us apply our consciences to something else!

But fugitives and vagabonds: there are an awful lot of fugitives on the earth just now. Is there a reason? Cities? There are an awful lot of ruined cities too. Is there a cause? Civilization? It has broken down in many places — fearfully. The application is quite literal, isn't it? Not just Bible rhetoric. It seems to be something that definitely happens.

But there is still another level. Civilized man can be a fugitive living in the Land of Nod — the Land of Wandering — in more senses than one. What about carrying it up to the psychological level, the spiritual level, if you will. The soul of an entire civilization is fugitive — its spiritual life inhabiting the wilderness, the land of wandering. Why? Is it because the higher you rise, the harder the quest? Because questions have been asked that are hard to be answered? Is it not far more because questions have been asked that we do not *want* answered?

Multitudes of people who complain of unsureness in their religious beliefs have failed to look into the unsureness in their *willingness* to believe. Have they wanted to believe in a religion that embraced the whole world? A universal religion? A religion that made them everywhere throughout the earth their brother's keeper? Have they wanted to accept this basic meaning of religion? Jesus says that those who will not do "the will of God" cannot "know the doctrine." If the moral challenge is refused, we are incapacitated for a confident spiritual experience. For, in the presence of God, we are told that our brother's blood cries out from the earth. Cries out from distant places — now

suddenly brought near. Manchuria, Ethiopia, Spain, China, Czechoslovakia, Poland . . . yes, we know the story now; we know the list! How far away they seemed a little while ago, how near today.

Perhaps this might seem to be enough. But we are not finished yet. Not quite. I told you at the beginning that this myth of Cain and Abel comes from a great period of change — the transition from nomadic life to agriculture: the change which brought about the overshadowing of tribalism and the beginning of nations. Well, another change has come — within the modern age. Man once discovered agriculture. He has now discovered the machine. He once learnt to plough the land. He now flies above it. He once learnt to write, carving his hieroglyphs in stone. His voice now travels instantaneously around the world. He once was compelled to mingle the tribes together, blending them into a nation, all the elements of which were forced to share a common fate. He now is compelled to mingle the nations together — and the races — and all the world must share a common fate.

The ancient question has acquired a powerful weight of emphasis. It must be answered at last. Plainly, unequivocally. Or not only will there be a wrecked civilization; the entire life of man will be wrecked. The whole earth has come to share a common fate. Cain has managed to be both a civilizer and a murderer for a very long time; and when driven forth has built new cities. But he cannot go on doing this much longer — not now. His murder has become his suicide. Its broader name is war. It has to end. Modern man must be a civilizer only. The murder must cease. Not forever can the blood of the simpler people — within civilization as well as outside it — be poured into

the ground. It is too much blood. Too much blood at Stalingrad! Too much blood in China! . . . and where will it flow in rivers next? We must prepare to answer! We must shout our answer; shout it so that all the world will hear; shout it above the crying out of blood from the earth; shout it till it sounds like the thunder of the voice of God! "*I am my brother's keeper! I, even I!*" And let it be a trumpet-call to the building of the City of Man.

Of course, Jesus answered this question unmistakably two thousand years ago. By the time it came to him, the word "brother" had been changed to "neighbor," a somewhat less downright and compelling word. And the question had been changed a little, too: "Who is my neighbor?" That is the form it took. If I am my neighbor's keeper, then who *is* my neighbor? — or to translate it back to the older language, If I am my brother's keeper, who is my brother?

That made it harder to answer, didn't it? It was a shrewd, well-calculated change. "Who *is* my neighbor?" the sophisticates inquired. And they certainly didn't expect an answer. They were sure there *was* no answer. They had argued it out for themselves. It just faded out, this question, when you tried to answer it — dwindled away. For you were sure that certain people were not your neighbors: your enemies and the people you had nothing much to do with; the people too far off to love effectively . . . and those too near! Yes, but where did you begin . . . or where end? Ah, blessed mystery! It was insoluble. Sit back! Breathe easily again! *It . . . was . . . insoluble!*

But not to Jesus. Jesus just looked straight at the question — and at the questioner — and it answered itself. "There was a certain man . . ." You know the parable . . . "Journeying from Jerusalem to Jerico . . . fell among

thieves . . . robbed, beaten, lying half-dead by the road. And a certain priest came that way. And a certain levite." I need not retell the story. You know how it ends. A certain Samaritan treated the half-dead man as his neighbor. Without knowing who he was, or what, he treated him as his neighbor. *Because he was his neighbor*: that is the meaning of the story. Because he *was*! Whoever he was, he was this man's neighbor; and he was this man's neighbor because he was every man's neighbor. "Go," said Jesus to the astonishment of those who asked the questions, "and do thou likewise."

We have reached the point, dear friends, where we also must do likewise. Events have long ago caught up with Genesis. Now they are catching up with Jesus. Events are — I said events, not people. But what about people? How often must the prophets speak despairingly to civilizations as Jesus did to Jerusalem: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her brood under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate!" It cannot be many times, for the hour has come when all the earth must face the most persistent question of the ages: and answer to the future and to God: "*I am my brother's keeper.*"

The Gift of Laughter

ACCORDING to the most qualified observers, human beings are the only earthly creatures that can laugh. I say, "according to the most qualified observers" because, for my own part, (speaking as a less qualified observer), I am not always entirely sure. We once had a cat in our household which sometimes gave me the uncomfortable feeling that he was laughing at me whenever I turned my back. At any rate, if I turned around suddenly, he always looked as though he was just straightening his face, and trying to seem as though he had not been laughing at all and thought I was confusing him with some other cat. Once or twice, I found myself saying to him, "Yes, I know, but you needn't think I'm the only funny one; human beings are all queer; so go ahead! Laugh!" He never answered me. But that may have been because the name we had given him was "The Archbishop of Canterbury", and it was beneath his dignity to explain himself to a lesser cleric.

If we set aside, however, the doubts and suspicions of unqualified observers, and place our reliance in the scientific ones, it may be safely understood that man alone among the living creatures of the earth can laugh. And this is a rather remarkable thing. It means that laughter is a dis-

tinguishing characteristic of the human level of existence. With the emergence of a fuller consciousness, with the dawn of mentality, with the coming of the powers of mind, life suddenly lifts up its voice and laughs. Why?

Nobody knows. Scientifically, no one can say what makes us laugh. Nobody knows why some things are funny and other things not funny, or why a thing can be funny to one person and far from funny to another person, or why some people laugh easily and other people only with difficulty, why some people laugh often and others hardly at all. The thing we call a sense of humor is literally a mystery. It cannot be defined. I do not mean that we can say nothing whatever about it or that we have no insight into it: I mean that no fundamental analysis of humor has ever been successfully made; no theory about it is ever adequate; no probing of it yields much enlightenment. The explanations offered by the psychologists, though quite informative, are always less than satisfying and often rather thin. Indeed, the modern psychologists and the ancient philosophers are all alike in this: they cannot explain laughter.

Yet, so far as we can tell, laughter is at least as old as humanity. Unfortunately, the oldest indications of humor that survive seem to be vindictive or sardonic. There exists a perfectly wicked caricature of the Egyptian King Ikhnaton, who was a great idealist and reformer. I am afraid his enemies much enjoyed it. In the Book of Genesis in the Bible, God complains because Sarah, the wife of Abraham, laughs with scornful incredulity, though in the circumstances as narrated one can scarcely blame her. The only laughter in the Book of Job is jeering laughter, and we read in the Psalms that God will laugh derisively at all his enemies. Yet, surely not all the laughter of ancient times can

have been unpleasant. Children, at least, must have laughed for joy.

Aristotle has a very gentle definition of humor. He says the comic consists in "some defect or ugliness which is not painful or destructive," and as an example gives the comic mask used in Greek plays — which is ugly but does not cause pain. He means that humor has something to do with whatever is out of proportion or playfully distorted. Well, some humor does, but by no means all. Rightly or wrongly, we can and do laugh at things which *are* painful and destructive; humor is sometimes stronger than sympathy; indeed, we can feel pain and laugh at the same time; we can be genuinely sympathetic and yet overcome with amusement, as, for example, when a slender chair collapses under the weight of a very large and pompous person, or when an individual of great dignity sits down unexpectedly on a polished floor. We hasten to help such a person to his feet, and we are truly anxious if we think he is hurt; yet, for the moment, we cannot altogether keep our laughter back. Sometimes we cannot keep it back when we, ourselves, suffer some indignity, or even when we are really hurt.

Immanuel Kant — one of the greatest among philosophers — defined the comical as "the sudden transformation of a strained expectation into nothing." Mr. Max Eastman, in a book written a few years ago, paraphrases this as "reaching after something and finding that it is not there." Which is obviously a very good definition of some humorous experiences, but not at all descriptive of others. And of course, it does not in the least tell us *why* we laugh when we reach out after something and find it absent. The late Professor William McDougall thought laughter was, among other things, "an antidote to sympathy." He believed we might

be too overcome by sympathetic reactions without the corrective of laughter. Well, we might. But sometimes, and especially in the kind of humor called wit, sympathy may hardly be aroused at all. I am afraid we have to confess that when we have been through all the definitions and studied all the explanations, we are not much wiser than we were before — a little wiser, perhaps, but not much. If anyone wants to read a popular exposition of what the theorists have attempted in this matter of trying to explain humor, he can do so in the book to which I referred a moment ago, Mr. Eastman's *Enjoyment of Laughter*. He need not read the whole book. All that is necessary is to read the introduction, the first chapter, and the notes at the end of the book. It is no disrespect to Mr. Eastman to say that if the reader will confine himself to that much and no more, he will have a much clearer idea of what the book is about than if he reads the whole of it. And his discovery will be the one I stated at the beginning: that humor is one of the things which cannot really be defined.

Yet it is an integral part of life, a very important part, one that we could ill afford to lose. Laughter is not just an interlude: it is a shaping force in human affairs, it can influence events, it can mold character. Whether benevolent or malignant, it is never a separate or disconnected thing; it is interwoven with everything else, one of the basic factors of experience, an indissoluble part of human life.

Unfortunately, religion has traditionally either neglected it or scorned it. In the prayer books there are no petitions for a sense of humor, none for its betterment, none which request the benefit of guidance in what to laugh at and what not. Somehow, religion has been thought too sacred for laughter; nobody seems to have suggested that

laughter itself might be a sacred gift. Why should it be thought that no one should laugh in church? And so seldom remembered that laughter could have something to do with refreshing the soul?

Perhaps it is because of the opinion of the ancients. "Laughter is mad," says the Book of Ecclesiastes, "and mirth, what is it?" "The pleasantest laughter," says Sophocles, "is at the expense of our enemies." Or Cicero: "Laughter has its springs in some kind of meanness or deformity." And St. John Chrysostom, "Laughter does not seem to be an [actual] sin, but it leads to sin." This opinion, unfortunately, has been confirmed by a great many of the more famous later thinkers. "Laughter," says Joseph Addison, ". . . weakens the faculties and causes a kind of . . . dissolution in all the powers of the soul." "I am neither of a melancholy nor a cynical disposition," says Lord Chesterfield in a letter to his son, ". . . but I am sure that, since I have had the full use of my reason, nobody has ever heard me laugh." It would be easily possible to add a great many more of these rather grim quotations. As Robert Ingersoll justly complained, "Laughing has always been considered by theologians as a crime." Yes, and not only by theologians, as we have seen. I am sorry to say that the poet, Shelley, once wrote that he thought there could be no complete regeneration of mankind "until laughter is put down." I think somebody must have been deriding him, or laughing at things he cared for. He did not stop long enough to remember all the people who had laughed *with* him, or all the laughter that had blown through human life like a cleansing wind.

I am not in the least overawed by all this testimony, and I hope you are not. I think the Church Fathers were mostly doing some special pleading. They knew that robust

humor could destroy the somber fabric of the creeds. They knew — in some deeper way which they did not want to recognize — that they themselves were somewhat laughable, that in posture and pretension they were vulnerable to satire, and that the only way to keep the people respectful was to stifle merriment. People like Lord Chesterfield could not afford to laugh. They needed excess dignity to mask their natural awkwardness, to cover up their lack of spontaneity. If they had once begun to laugh, people would have known too much about them — not only their abilities, which were considerable, but their deficiencies, which at all costs they wanted to hide. It takes humility to laugh; and even greater humility to submit yourself to be laughed at. And so, to avoid the cost of this humility, many men, including men of eminence, have sought to keep their lives completely formalized, and thus protect their dignity. We can understand this with sympathy; we need not be harsh. But on the other hand, we need not be intimidated, either.

At the very least, laughter is emotional release. As Wyndham Lewis has put it, "Laughter is the mind sneezing." Something tickles or irritates and produces a tension: a laugh, like a sneeze, relieves it. At the very least it is that. But it can be far more. In my view, it is an essential ingredient of religion — of honest, wholesome religion. If I were asked what single quality every human being needs more than any other, I would answer, the ability to laugh at himself. When we see our own grotesqueries, how quaint we are, how droll our ambitions are, how comical we are in almost all respects, we automatically become more sane, less self-centered, more humble, more wholesome. To laugh at ourselves, we have to stand outside ourselves — and that is an immense benefit. Our puffed-up pride and touchy self-

importance vanish; a clean and sweet humility begins to take possession of us. We are on the way to growing a soul.

That is how St. Francis of Assisi did it. He would never have been a saint or found his way to greatness if people had not laughed at him. He went away as a young man — and a very vain young man — to the wars. He went with pomp and many a boast. And he came back without striking a blow, disabled by a stomach-ache. People laughed. It hurt. It hurt deeply, inconsolably. Francis ran away from it. Then he discovered something: He discovered what it was that the people were laughing at. He began to laugh at it himself. His vanity — that was what it was: his vanity. And so he got rid of his vanity. It was the first step on the road not only to great achievements, great aims, great loyalties; it was the first step on the road to personal serenity, contentment, happiness. It was the first step and a long one. And if you will remember, the glory and distinction of St. Francis was that he brought back joy to religion. He learned to laugh, and his laughter ripples like a clear stream through the stony river bed of many Christian centuries.

Laughter can do that. But it can also do some simpler things. I say "simpler," but perhaps they are not simpler at all — just lowlier. Yet with a grace and charm which can make life noticeably sweeter than it was before. For instance, I was sitting in a dining car on the Pennsylvania Railroad not very long ago, and opposite me was a lady, a quite elderly lady, with beautiful white hair and one of the kindest faces I have ever seen. There was a sort of aura of quiet benevolence about her, something almost saintly, full of contentment, full of peace. Then between courses, to my intense amazement, she lighted herself a cigarette and began to read a murder-mystery — a book

which had been lying in her lap. She smiled me one of the sweetest smiles I ever saw, and bending confidentially towards me, this is what she said: "I just *love* murder, don't you?" I am sorry to say that I was quite unequal to the occasion and immediately choked. But if the Pennsylvania Railroad will promise me dining companions like that on every journey I take, I will never again buy a ticket on the "B & O". What I am trying to say in relating this story is merely this: that sheer quaintness is part of the joy of life, that unexpected laughter is one of its most blissful attributes. That this — just this, if it were nothing more — is quite wonderful in itself and wholesome and refreshing. I believe it is a gift, an embellishment, an adornment; an enrichment of our common lot together; a gift of God. I am grateful for laughter, just as laughter. It is a sweet and lovely thing.

But, of course, it is more. Even in the laughter of distortion, of the disproportionate, there is often courage. For example, in the case of the London lady who was asked by a visitor what she thought of air raids. (This was during the Battle of Britain). "Well," she said, "they *are* a bit of a nuisance, but after all, they keep your mind off the war." The quality of this sort of humor is much too subtle for analysis, but if there is not a certain courage in it, even a certain audacity, I confess I do not know what courage is.

Then we must remember, too, that if there is a laughter of the disproportionate there is also a laughter which restores *proportion*. People can get too serious about themselves — even about the work they are doing. I remember a certain very eminent minister in London in the days when I had a parish there, a minister who was well along in years before he discovered that religion ought to have something to say about economic wrongs and industrial injustice.

When he made this discovery, he wanted to put everything right all at once. He talked ceaselessly about it. After a rather warm session at a church conference, he forgathered with a number of other ministers to take tea at Lyon's Corner House in the Strand. He immediately began to apply the social gospel, the gospel of economic justice, to the low wages and long hours of restaurants. He talked interminably about it. "I will guarantee," he said, "that the waitresses in this restaurant work until midnight." He called one of the waitresses to the table. "Now, my dear," he asked her, "what time do you leave work this evening?" The girl looked at him very archly. "Too late for you, dearie," she replied. Yes! Even ministers can become too intense about things; and much too important about them! Laughter restores a sense of proportion. And that is no small thing.

If I had the time, I would like to speak of some other things it can do. Of some things it has done. The laughter of Charles Dickens accomplished what all the sober-minded reformers of the nineteenth century failed to bring about: abolished the debtors' prisons and gave a more humane program to English poorhouses. His inspired fiction made the victims of these institutions human beings instead of cast-aways known chiefly through statistics; he brought them to life, allowed them to be humorous as well as tragic, mingled the comical with the sentimental. And he made the officials of these institutions ridiculous. He created such characters as Mr. Bumble and Mrs. Corney. And when England had finished laughing at them, their real-life counterparts were already on the way out. Laughter can be a weapon. Yes, and it can also be a means of insight, of disclosure, of revelation; it can be a medicine, a hygiene, an instrument of change and reformation.

It can restore a sense of reality. I would like for a moment to dwell upon that. Fantastic dreams — dreams, yes, and nightmares — both fade away in the flashing light of humor. One of the worst nightmares ever shared by large numbers of people was the nightmare called Hell. It gripped these people in the talons of a loathsome fear, the fear of eternal torture, everlasting punishment. It is difficult for modern minds to imagine how vivid and convincing that nightmare was. People really believed in it. Countless thousands of sermons depicted its horrors to terrified congregations. Anxiety and apprehension about it threw a lurid glow all over the natural joys and wholesome sweetness of the common life. What changed all this? Well, many things, of course. But I am sure that one of the most powerful factors in the liberation of the mind of modern man from fears of Hell was this: that a few audacious spirits began to make jokes about it. And the jokes caught on . . . and spread. Every one of us has heard innumerable jokes about Hell. But it took real courage to make such jokes at one time. The courage was produced. Hell was seen to be not only infamous and outrageous, but ridiculous, too. Not only morbid but droll. The human spirit rebelled against it and in doing so, began to laugh. That was the beginning of the end of Hell. Such humor — quite reckless, at first, but confident and bold after a while — was God's own gift, restoring men to reality, redeeming them from a nightmare. Laughter can do that.

It can do much more. It can permit us to meet frustration without bitterness, to master disappointment with a jest. It can soften the emotion we call chagrin. It can lift up the heart a little in a desperate situation. It can make defeats and deprivations bearable. In some of the most somber

hours of life, a gleam of wistful humor lights the path. It is a very soft laughter, then, very soft and very brave. Not so much laughter as the distilled essence of laughter, quiet and deep beyond all definition or description.

Here is Simon Peter, for instance, vowing his loyalty to Jesus in the hour of impending crisis. "I will never betray thee," says Peter. "Never." And the heart of Jesus is hungry for such loyalty. But he looks at Peter and knows the truth. His eyes smile at him with a gentle mockery which is one tenth irony, nine tenths love. He knows Peter. He begins to answer and the same smile that is in his eyes trembles a little on his lips. "Before morning," he says, "thou wilt deny me thrice." And then, a little more openly he smiled. The Scripture does not say so, but I know that is how it happened. Just exactly like that. Peter looked so earnest. He understood himself so little and he protested his loyalty so loud. It was tragic — but it was comical, too. "Oh, Peter! So bold to promise, so frail to keep the boasted vow!" And in the brokenhearted moment, Jesus, knowing himself deserted, loved the lesser man for the loyalty that was not quite enough, the loyalty that would fail — loved him for being as loyal as he was, loved him for wanting to be braver than was possible, loved him, perhaps, just for love's own sake; and yet laughed a little echo of a laugh inside himself. Peter, good, honest Peter. He thought he meant it, wanted to mean it, did Peter. It was very moving, yet it was funny, really; amusing; one had to laugh a little: it was whimsical, it was quaint, it was droll.

Oh humanity! How strong you are — and how weak! How godlike in promise, how faltering in performance! How brave and how fearful, how faithful, how fickle, how firm and how frail! And Jesus laughed — a little. Then he

turned and looked into the distance and was stronger — it would have been hard to say why — stronger, and more sure.

Laughter! We shall need it — some of us more, some of us less. But we shall need it — all of us. What is it? We do not know. But we know this: laughter is not a thing of chance, not an accident of circumstance, not an odd and alien addition to the human level of existence. Laughter is native to the mind, born of the spirit, a natural sacrament of life.

Have you ever seen a newly-bereaved widow interrupt her sobbing to laugh through her grief at the antics of her child? I have. Have you ever joined quietly in the laughter of someone whose humor is irrepressible even though death is waiting just an hour or two away? I have. And I can tell you that laughter, no matter what else it is, is courage. O this brave, this gallant mystery of laughter! There is no end to its daring, no limit to its defiance.

Have you ever thought of the tremendous significance of the fact that this is a world in which men can laugh? This world of frustration, of pain, of multiplied miseries; this world of threats and perils unceasing? If there were no other reason whatever for believing in God, an all-compelling reason would be this: that the world rings with laughter. Even within the cry of its agony, there is this other note, this other cry, this laugh of defiance. The mind of man, out of the hidden secret of its own mystery, can nonetheless look out, see all, and, when the worst is at the worst, can laugh. In the wilderness, laughter! On a tiny speck of dust called earth, lost in the cold immensities of mindless and unknowing space, there lives the creature of a flickering moment, this oddity, this little thing, this less than nothing known as

man. He knows the shortness of the moment, how brief the day is and how long the night. And yet he laughs. His laughter ripples through the universe. Is it insanity? The frenzy of the thwarted, the madness of the doomed?

Not this laughter! this saving, wholesome laughter. Man did not invent it. He did not even improvise it. He was born with it. He found it in his comprehension, the mystery of it in his soul. Whatever made man, made laughter, too. Whatever is the ultimate nature of reality, laughter came out of it, laughter laughs back at it, laughter laughs with it, laughter defies whatever stands against it. It can do so because — no matter what the contradictions, the want of understanding, the fears and doubts — somewhere at the heart of things, confidence dwells. Confidence strong enough to laugh. Confidence that knows its own victory. Confidence that knows itself invincible. Confidence that is God. Laughter is the challenge of the living soul to whatever is not yet conquered, the promise of the spirit's supremacy, the courage of the world's new morning, vanquishing forever the receding dark.

The Stutter of Demosthenes

THE brilliant historian, Egon Friedell, in the introduction to his magnum opus, *A Cultural History of the Modern Age*, makes a fascinating suggestion. He reminds us that according to legend, Achilles, the Greek warrior, was invulnerable except for his heel; only in that one place could he suffer harm. It was this that made him invincible, at any rate until the long-averted arrow found the fatal spot. Now the meaning of the legend is generally supposed to be that even the most heroic person has a weakness somewhere, and this weakness may eventually prove his undoing.

But asks Friedell, is this the true significance of the legend? Why might it not be the other way around? "What if the vulnerable spot, the consciousness of its vulnerability, and the dogged, heroic struggle against it causes a hero to be born?" Invulnerability did not make Achilles a hero, after all; it was *vulnerability* that did it. Knowing himself to be *invulnerable*, he might have tried to be victorious without effort; nothing could harm him anyway: but knowing that in one place he could be harmed, that sooner or later, the fatal injury might reach it, he extended himself. After all, a man is not courageous unless he is afraid. If there is nothing to be afraid of, there is no need for courage.

Courage is the conquest of fear, not the absence of it. Perhaps, therefore, it was his vulnerable heel which made Achilles a hero and a conqueror, and perhaps that is what the legend is trying to tell us. This may not be entirely logical, says Friedell, but for that reason it may be the more true. And he goes on to develop his suggestion with a number of other examples.

Demosthenes had a very bad stutter which it took an agonizing effort to subdue. Yet *Demosthenes* was regarded even by the critical Athenians of his own time as the greatest of all orators. To this some one may feel moved to rejoin, "Just think what *Demosthenes* might have done if he had *not* had a stutter!" But *would* he? Without a stammering utterance to compensate and conquer, *Demosthenes* might not have been an orator at all. The stutter was not just a handicap; it was also a goad and a stimulus. In overcoming it and in getting along in spite of it, *Demosthenes* developed a power and confidence which otherwise he would never have known. Another man, with no impediment in his speech, would have been more dependent upon the good will of his audience. But *Demosthenes* had had to face humiliation and outface it: in the end no audience could disconcert or intimidate him. The thread of his thought ran smoothly, no self-consciousness interfered with his choice of words, nothing clouded the penetration of his mind — all this he had mastered by mastering a greater obstacle: the stammering of his tongue.

Yes, Friedell undoubtedly is right. It is a matter open to observation, I think, that people who speak with a golden-voiced fluency, instantaneously charming to the ear, seldom have much to say. They rely upon their larynxes rather than their logic. They do not feel compelled to

think very critically or prepare very carefully and so at last they hardly think or prepare at all. They are never nervous, never have doubted their power to hold an audience, and so there is no nervous tension in their speaking. They captivate by charm. It is so easy, so effortless, that no one ever feels that a man has been struggling to find the right words in which to state a hard-won truth. In the end, this sort of eloquence fails to be persuasive: first, the discriminating few, then, finally, the multitude begin to know that there is really very little behind the flowing river of words. They begin to wish for "an honest stutter now and then —" or at any rate for some evidence that a man has been thinking himself through a difficult problem — and that he is now inviting the audience to share the process of his thought.

I do not say that this is always so. A gifted speaker may have had other handicaps to overcome, having nothing to do with elocution and these may have stimulated him to utmost effort. Yet, in general, the thesis holds. What comes easily means less, and it means less because it *is* less, and it *is* less because it has come too easily.

Demosthenes owed his oratory to his stutter: yes, and not only so, for to the same handicap, he doubtless owed the high development of his mind, the sharper edge of his thought. Because it was harder to say it, the content of his speeches had to be more tangibly convincing and the style clearer and more compelling: the audience which would not respond to his imperfect vocalization must be made to respond to the content of what he said. And what of sympathy and the deepened comprehension that it brings? Is sympathy ever quickened by anyone who has never known frustration? — never been thwarted by his insufficiency? Yet without sympathy, how could Demosthenes have had

such understanding of his audience? Or even of his subject? All this and more he owed in major part to his original handicap.

But let us leave Demosthenes and look at other instances. In the Vienna of Laube's day the Burgtheater achieved a standard of acting never before equalled or afterwards surpassed: yet every single one of the actors had some defect of speech. Leonardo da Vinci and Holbein were both left-handed and had to learn to paint in an awkward, opposite way. Not only Napoleon and Frederick the Great, but also Attila and Charlemagne were short men, thickset and undersized. They had to compensate by the development of other powers for unimpressive physical personalities. Michelangelo, sovereign of the world of beauty, was repulsively ugly; Lord Byron, unrivaled exalter of the perfect form, was lame from birth; Immanuel Kant, who has been called "the world's wonder in logical, vertical, rectilinear thinking," suffered from spinal curvature; Schubert, whose sensitive music is sound transmuted into grace and tenderness, was fat, short-legged and so awkward that no woman would look at him. Beethoven, when he wrote his greatest music, was deaf.

If we turn from men to women, we can recollect that none of those most famous in history for their fascination were really beautiful. Very beautiful women are almost always — shall we say — insipid? (I said *almost* always!)

Friedell, who adds to the examples I have cited a great many others, asks in conclusion whether the Greeks did not understand all this, not only when they gave us the legend of Achilles, but even more and perhaps supremely, when they told us that Homer was blind. Homer, with "wide-seeing, sun-intoxicated, color-sensitive second sight"

was blind! Was that why he could describe with superlative perfection what he never saw? Is this always so? Not always perhaps, but impressively often. Helen Keller is one of the greatest women of our age. Her writing is full not only of cadence but of beautiful imagery. Yet she was both blind and deaf from her early infancy.

And why are we frequently forced to wonder at the kinship of genius with madness? The borderline can be terribly thin. Even the talented — those who fall far short of genius but nevertheless are endowed with unusual ability — are very prone to quirks of temperament. Many, perhaps all, who have unusual measures of creative power, are more or less neurotic. In ordinary respects they are prone to be odd, incalculable, not entirely normal. They are either far too sensitive or else not sensitive enough. They are difficult to get along with except when they choose to be amiable. What does it all mean? Friedell says, and I think truly, that a genius is a forcing bed, a seething focus of life. Powerfully creative minds are moved by a greater intensity of living, a more acute sense of reality, a more stormy conflict of experience, a more energetic impulse to fulfill themselves and through themselves something beyond themselves and greater. Their light is brighter and their shadow gloomier; their will to achieve is stronger and all their energies more profuse.

Now it is beyond question that those we recognize as geniuses have seldom been altogether healthy men. Dean Swift, Edgar Allen Poe, Nietzsche, Maupassant, Hugo Wolf, Vincent van Gogh and a host of other geniuses finally went mad. Julius Caesar and Napoleon, the Apostle Paul and Mohammed, Alexander the Great and his father Philip, not to mention many others, were epileptics. Rousseau, Scho-

penhauer, Strindberg and literally scores of greater and lesser geniuses suffered from persecution manias of one severity or another. Even Bismarck, supposed to be a genius in the field of action and a man of iron, was so neurasthenic that his life can be measured by his paroxysms of weeping.

It is interesting that the famous anatomist, Hansemann, who examined the brains of a large number of distinguished artists and scientists, discovered that a surprisingly large number of them were hydrocephalous; water on the brain!

It has been pointed out, too, I think by Adler, that many of those to whom history has accorded fame displayed what psychiatrists call "iterative phenomena," that is, signs — incipient only in their cases — of dementia praecox. The symptom consists in the accumulation and repetition of what might be called "pet phrases." Plato, Martin Luther and Thomas Carlyle would be instances.

Well, this is only a little of what, when all of it is collected together, amounts to very impressive evidence that genius in a high degree, and talent in a lesser degree, carry with them something bordering on the pathological, something not entirely healthy, even something dangerous to the stability of both body and mind.

Now we generally think of this unhappy accompaniment of genius as a by-product, an unaccountable misfortune. But we may be wrong. What if we thought of it not as a by-product but as a causative factor? Just as the stutter of Demosthenes may have accounted for his eloquence and power, once he had conquered it or compensated for it, so the unhealthy factor in genius may be the very thing which channeled into fruitfulness, brings genius to pass. Those who have done the most work in this difficult field apparently have very little doubt of it. They use one inclusive

word for the unhealthy factor which stimulates unusual power: *irritation*.

Genius is produced in large part, or so it seems, by irritation. So, in its lesser degree, is talent. Inferiority is irritating and makes a man do something to conquer it, or to compensate for it. Frustration is irritating and may call forth unusual efforts to eliminate it. Of course, the total powers of the individual may be unequal to the struggle. In that case, there will be no genius. Instead, there may be neurasthenia or madness. But when the powers of the individual *are* sufficient to meet the challenge, or can become so, genius may flower.

Now I do not pretend that this is a complete account of genius. Far from it. I do not even pretend that it accounts entirely for talent. But I think that as far as it goes, it is true. At this point, someone may feel moved to remark that what we have been doing down to now is reinforcing the old lesson of the oyster that produces a pearl. The struggle to overcome some handicap, some deficiency, some frustration, helps to produce an unusual excellence. It comes from "irritation," just as an oyster, in covering a foreign substance within its shell, may produce a pearl. Without the irritation of the foreign substance which threatens the oyster, there would be no pearl. So it is with human powers of unusual worth. They come from "irritation."

But before we pass on to seek a larger wisdom in this thesis, let us safeguard it from the imprudent and incautious. Genius is never quite healthy, true; but genius is never quite sick, either. If you, dear friend, happen to be neurotic, or think you are, it is not thereby certified that you are talented. Not all oysters produce pearls when irri-

tated by foreign substances. Otherwise, we should have more pearls. No, some oysters just get sick! Others remain fairly healthy but get along somehow without producing pearls. It is not much different with human beings. Please do not tell your friends that because you are irritable you must be a genius. You may just be irritable! Do not tell your wife that your irritability indicates talent. She may produce some similar signs of "talent" herself! Genius — or talent — comes not only from irritation which occasions it, but also from the latent energies which are there to be called forth. You cannot make a Demosthenes out of a half-wit, no matter how much he stutters. Yes, and nothing is more pitiful than a person who thinks he is a genius because he cannot get along with other people. He's just emotionally undeveloped — perhaps through having fallen too tenderly in love with himself. I am not afraid that what I say will be discouraging to geniuses if any happen to be attentive to these words: it is next to impossible to discourage genius. If it can be discouraged, it is probably not genius.

With the safeguards indicated, let us now go on to draw some useful inferences — such as we can apply not only to the exceptional but to ourselves. Is it true that life — even ordinary life — is limited and imprisoned by its handicaps? The very opposite is true. Every individual has the capacity for his own fulfillment. His handicaps, his deficiencies, his frustrations, may be the very means by which he rises to creative levels. No man is entitled to sit back and declare himself defeated; he must weave from the circumstances of his life — from his abilities, his insufficiencies, his courage and his fears; from the strength of his joy and the ache of his pain — the pattern and texture of a life fulfilled.

If he refuses, he and all life everywhere will be defrauded.

How surely can we speak of deficiencies at all? Suppose someone had come along and instantly cured the stutter of Demosthenes? Or suppose Demosthenes had been discouraged from public speaking? All human life would be the poorer for the loss — as well as Demosthenes. What began as a deficiency ended as a force. Moreover, let us be warned against accepting any handicap as final or conclusive. If Demosthenes had taken a modern aptitude test, he would have been told to try anything whatsoever rather than public speaking. I do not mean by this that aptitudes are never to be studied; but I do mean that no test except that of life itself can ever be conclusive. The deciding factor may be what a man possesses in his own inner life; what fortitude, what courage, what resources of the spirit, what quality of soul.

And even if a favored purpose must be given up, no life is walled in by a single possibility. A human life can be shaped to power and beauty with all the odds against it. We need to recapture this truth. We need to know that life is tested, that it manifests its value, its significance, at last, for one thing alone: the quality, the spiritual quality of its individual souls. In the language of democracy, this means that every individual is a free person, entitled to unfettered opportunity by natural right; in the language of the religion of Jesus, it means that nothing is greater than the freedom of the soul. Through this freedom, these opportunities, all of us can come — not in the shallower sense but in the deeper — to our highest reaches of development, to true fulfillment.

It is always the wisdom of the individual life which, written larger, is the genuine and authentic wisdom of the

world. The fundamental weakness of totalitarianism — as of all authoritarian systems — is a lack of insight into values. All its errors come from this: that it blinds itself to recognition of the worth of the human spirit and to the power of man to grow by rising to the level of his problems and thereby to remedy his own deficiencies. Therefore, it condemns man to a dead level of mass stupidity; it says life is for the brilliant and the brutal, never for the humble and the weak who struggle to be strong. We have seen how this apostasy turns out. The goose step is a death march and it always will be, both to the body and the soul.

There is nothing more stuttering and stammering — let us admit it — than the plans we make for a better world. But those who despise this broken utterance and deride this faltering effort have nothing to offer but defeat. We must go on — on until in all things we see clearly and speak plainly, goaded by our handicaps, our insufficiencies.

Man has always been handicapped. Compared with other creatures he is physically weak, he is menaced by a host of enemies, threatened by cold and famine, drought and storm. Because of this he learnt to conquer the earth's resources and to subdue all other creatures; to protect himself, and to be sheltered, warm and fed. Man is a puny creature whose very weakness has compelled him to become the master of the earth. He had to make this conquest to survive at all: and so he made it.

Now, having mastered the earth, it is required of him that he master himself; that once again, his weakness, his insufficiency shall goad him to his new achievements.

That is the way it always was. Attainment comes through what we do with means inadequate to gain our ends. Thought would never have reached its noblest powers

of flight if from the beginning it had been winged. Language would never have overflowed into poetry if it had not stammered when it overtaxed itself in prose. Longing would always have been madness if it had not surpassed itself in love. Man would never have been man if, in a world unknown and full of mystery, he had not struggled until he grew a soul.

It is what we do not have and reach for — what we do not have and reach beyond — that turns our shuddering into boldness and audacity, and kindles our earthiness to flame. It is out of our weakness that we learn what to do with strength; it is because, when we most desire to speak, our speech is faltering, that what begins as broken utterance ends as prayer.

A Sword and a Pair of Crutches

A GREAT deal of teaching and preaching is based upon the assumption that we could all be alike if we wished: whereas, in spite of admonitions based upon this premise, we remain incorrigibly varied and diversified. Some of us, no matter how often we are told to be wise, will on the whole be rather foolish. Others of us, though glad to be advised to be afraid of nothing, will be afraid of nearly everything. When told to be considerate and gentle, some of us will find it easy to be so; others will find it hard but nonetheless will manage fairly well; still others, no matter how prodigious their exertions, will go on being inconsiderate just the same as ever, and will never be so clumsy as when stretching every fiber in the effort to be gentle.

I remember preaching a sermon some years ago — a quiet, rather simple sermon — recommending patience and forbearance in personal relationships. I showed logically, psychologically, theologically, and beyond the slightest peradventure of a doubt, how useless and inadvisable it is to lose one's temper. And afterwards a member of the congregation said to me, "That was a fine sermon but it didn't reckon with my blood pressure!" I realized, of course, that the criticism was well taken. Not for one moment while I

was making that sermon did it occur to me to take into account people with a difficult blood pressure. Nor would it have done me much good if I had. Sermons must be made without regard to people's blood pressures — usually — as otherwise it would be impossible to make them at all. Yet the man was entirely right. He could no more be even in his disposition than I could climb Mount Everest.

The situation is that all of us must sometimes speak and act upon the basis of the common needs and aspirations of humanity in general — in fact, must usually do so — but should also sometimes stop to recollect the incompleteness of this broad assumption. It is a difficult and restless process — this business of trying to bring the world to a common outlook, a common level of sufficient effort, and a common fund of right ideas — to do this and still keep in mind the truth that not all people are alike; that in spite of utopian dreamers and impatient reformers who base their plans upon the common elements of human need and human possibility, the differences will still remain. This does not mean that nothing can be done to move us forward, all of us together. Much *has* been done and more is waiting to be done — a great deal of it very urgent. No, all that it means is that we need at times a breadth of outlook that keeps us generous and a depth of insight that quickens sympathy and understanding.

Now there was a man, himself an impatient reformer, who nevertheless bethought him of all this. And when he came to the end of a book he was writing — one of the greatest books in the English language — he gave it what is perhaps its most beautiful and moving expression. I speak of John Bunyan. And because today he is much neglected I would like to take a moment to tell you a little about him.

While Pilgrims and Puritans were voyaging across the rough Atlantic to the new freedom of America, this man was languishing in Bedford Jail. It was a far from pleasant place to be. The town of Bedford, England, spreads across the River Ouse and the old jail used to stand at one end of the bridge, with its dungeons below the level of the water.

John Bunyan was a tinker by trade — a mender of pots and pans — and a preacher by choice: a preacher by his own quite irresistible decision. That is why he was in jail. The Church of England wanted no tinkers as preachers, particularly if they said the things Bunyan kept on saying. There was no law against preaching but there *was* a law against staying away from Sunday Services and so he was apprehended on the charge of absenting himself from church. The meetings which he himself addressed were not acknowledged as religious services by the authorities, for they were not approved by the established church. When Bunyan showed that they were more fully in conformity with New Testament practice, that only made his situation worse. And so a warrant was made out for his arrest and the following indictment written: that “John Bunyan, of the town of Bedford, laborer, hath devilishly and perniciously abstained from coming to church to hear Divine service, and is a common upholder of several unlawful meetings and conventicles, to the great disturbance and distraction of the good subjects of this kingdom, contrary to the laws of our sovereign lord, the king.”

Well, on this indictment, strange-sounding to modern ears, Justice Keeling, a savage and brutal judge, found Bunyan guilty — without troubling to take evidence or examine witnesses — and sentenced him to prison until he was willing to attend divine worship at the established church and

give up his troublesome habit of preaching. And if he failed to submit within a reasonable time, he was to be banished from the realm and if found again in England, was to "stretch by the neck for it," as the verdict put it.

Bunyan's answer to the judge's browbeating was a single sentence: "If I was out of prison today, I would preach again tomorrow, by the help of God!" And so for twelve long years he was left in Bedford Jail. How easy it is to say the words! How hard to imagine the cruel reality! Twelve English springtimes with a magic loveliness through all the countryside — while he rotted in his dungeon. Twelve summers with gardens filled with flowers — while all he saw was the water oozing through the moss that covered the walls of his cell. Twelve years, sick and shivering, in Bedford Jail! In the hours of daylight, his little blind daughter came to the prison to share the task of tagging shoelaces, the wages for which kept her from starving. Think of it! A man with the sensitiveness of a poet, watching his own child come and go in the morning and the evening which, to her in her blindness, were the perpetual dark; and barely keeping alive by her own and his exertions. But when she was gone, he turned to pen and paper, and night after night, he wrote. Let us be glad that at least they allowed him writing materials. For with them, he not only alleviated his own prison weariness, but he gave us the immortal fruit of his inspired imagination.

In *Pilgrim's Progress*, the wonderful allegorical story he wrote, metaphors come to life as persons, incarnations of virtues and vices, moods and moments, helps and hindrances, along the path of human pilgrimage. It is not necessary for modern minds to attend to his theology; that was the product of the times he lived in. The insight into human

nature is the thing to notice; for, long before psychology began to be a science, Bunyan was a superb psychologist.

In his book he traces the adventures and misadventures of two groups of pilgrims and it is near the end of the journey of the second group that we find the passage which is so full of insight into the variations in human powers and possibilities.

Two of the little group are about to cross over the river of death. They have received the summons and so are calling their friends and making their bequests. One is Mr. Valiant-for-Truth, whose character is exactly what his name implies. He is the embodiment of personal force and fearlessness, the very incarnation of moral courage. With him he carries a sword and that is the symbol of his pilgrimage. His is the spirit militant. No matter what he meets, he fights it down and passes onward. His deviations from the path are few. His doubts are brief, his faith is confident. He has no patience with self-pity or self-indulgence, no place for despondency, no room for despair. His sword is forged in the heat of passionate conviction. With it he hews his way through all confusion, all bewilderment, all obstacles and opposition. He is a man of faith and fortitude, of vision and achievement.

Such men as he have carved their names in history. Others no different in quality have not been widely known but nonetheless belong in the same victorious company. Not that their victories come easily. The struggle is desperate even for the brave and strong. Mr. Valiant-for-Truth is often near the point of exhaustion. To those who watch, it seems that he cannot long continue; he will go under, they say; he will be defeated. But no, from somewhere he always finds the strength, the courage, yes, and the skill. He fights his

way relentlessly to victory. He is Mr. Valiant-for-Truth!

What, then, is his bequest? This is how the passage reads: "After this it was noised abroad that Mr. Valiant-for-Truth was taken with a summons [and] . . . when he understood it, he called for his friends and told them of it. Then, said he, I am going to my Father's and though with great difficulty I am got hither, yet now I do not repent me of all the trouble I have been at to arrive where I am . . . My marks and scars I carry with me to be a witness for me . . . My sword I give to him that shall succeed me in my pilgrimage, and my courage and skill to him that can get it."

Surely, this is the perfect bequest! "My sword I give to him that shall succeed me in my pilgrimage . . ." Yes, for nobody else can gain possession of it. Nobody else could handle it. It is like King Arthur's fabulous sword, Excalibur. It must be pulled out of the rock by the arm that is strong enough to extract it. Trembling hands cannot grasp its hilt, cannot hold it, could not wield it. For courage and skill are "for him that can get it." No miracle here! No impossible transformations through supernatural aid. Bunyan's insight is too true to let him pretend that all human pilgrims can carry the sword of Mr. Valiant-for-Truth. Not even the best religion can give courage and skill to those who are not able to "get it." To get it, that is, by the long, hard fight from which the strength of moral courage and the victorious valor of the soul must grow. This kind of pilgrim must be such as Browning's:

One who never turned his back but marched breast forward,
Never doubted clouds would break,
Never dreamed, though right were worsted, wrong would triumph.
Held we fall to rise, are baffled to fight better,
Sleep to wake.

Or a pilgrim like Henley, who thanked "whatever gods there be" for his "unconquerable soul."

And there are many others, comrades and equals of Mr. Valiant-for-Truth, the pilgrim who has no patience with cowardice and none with lies. He wants reality, does Mr. Valiant-for-Truth, and he wants to be master of it. His is the religion of the stout heart and the invincible spirit. Above all things, he values courage. His faith is irresistible, indomitable. No matter how frail may be the life of all men in their littleness beneath the stars, Mr. Valiant-for-Truth is a great pilgrim. We are not surprised to find Bunyan telling us that when he comes to cross the river, he calls out in challenge, "Death, where is thy sting?" And when he goes in deeper and the waters threaten to pass over him, he shouts defiantly, "Grave, where is thy victory?" He is the glory and the joy of all pilgrims: Mr. Valiant-for-Truth! And so, says Bunyan, "he passed over, and all the trumpets sounded for him on the other side."

His sword is yours or mine — if we can wield it! His courage and skill are ours to be inherited — if we can get them! And many of us can. Not easily. Not without a struggle. Not perhaps without a fierce and prolonged struggle. And when we have got them we shall have to fight to keep them. But if we do, we can say at the end: "Though with great difficulty I am got hither, yet now I do not repent me of all the trouble I have been at to arrive where I am." The joy of that to the man who can say it is too deep for utterance. The trumpets will sound for him not only at the end of his pilgrimage but again and again as he fights his way through. This is faith at its utmost, pilgrimage at its strongest, its bravest, its best.

But there was another pilgrim and he also made a be-

quest. He went to Mr. Valiant to ask him for help in making his will, for the summons came to both of them near the same time. He was such a pilgrim as needed to be near Mr. Valiant as often as he could. He looked to Mr. Valiant for leadership, for encouragement, for example. This pilgrim's name was Mr. Ready-to-Halt. When the summons came, poor Mr. Ready-to-Halt was very wistful. He looked about him and thought carefully of what there might be that he could leave to others and it seemed as though there was really nothing to bequeath. He had no sword. His courage was not worth leaving. And he claimed no skill. So, finally, he made the following bequest: "These crutches I bequeath to my son that shall tread in my steps, with a hundred warm wishes that he may prove better than I have done." There is something strangely, wonderfully moving about that bequest, as generous as it is lonesome. "These crutches . . . to my son . . . with a hundred warm wishes that he may prove better than I have done!"

Poor Mr. Ready-to-Halt. All he had managed was a limping pilgrimage. Full of doubts, full of fears, stopped again and again by anxious hesitations and delays. What little courage he had built up would always ebb away. Gloom would overshadow all his thoughts. Over and over, he would be halted by frustration. He wanted to move faster, but he couldn't. He wanted to go on his own two feet, but he couldn't. There was no help for it. If he was to be a pilgrim at all, it had to be on crutches.

Many and many a time, his feet ached from the rough places in the journey. Perhaps it would be better, he thought, to give it up. How could he know it *was* a pilgrimage? How could he be sure that *any* faith would hold, that any truth was true? Perhaps life was just an aimless journey,

a fitful, fretful, futile passage between the darkness and the dark.

They said to him, "Mr. Ready-to-Halt, throw away your crutches! You do not need them! Truth doesn't limp. Faith isn't lame. Holding on to those crutches is just superstition. Get rid of them. Throw them away!"

And Mr. Ready-to-Halt thought that perhaps he would. He felt the shame of them. And sometimes he felt a little glow of hope. He *could* do without them — he thought. Of course he could. So he threw them away by the side of the road. Then he took a step or two and suddenly he was down on the ground — crawling back to where he had left his crutches.

"Oh, Mr. Ready-to-Halt," the other pilgrims said, "you are not really a pilgrim at all. Better give it up. What's the use of going on a travesty, a caricature of a pilgrimage? What's the use of working so hard for a courage you haven't got and a faith you always doubt? You let yourself down. You let your friends down. You let everybody down. Get off those crutches or get out of the pilgrim way!"

Mr. Ready-to-Halt was very sorrowful and wondered if it might not be just as they said. Then it kept occurring to him that even a limping pilgrimage is a pilgrimage nevertheless. Some men, he thought, are born color-blind, others without a sense of music or poetry, others without strong minds, others limping and lame. Yet, thought he, perhaps they can all be pilgrims. Perhaps they have something they can do, something they can give. And so, as best he could, he stuck to his pilgrimage.

Probably his question is often a stark and frightening one to many another pilgrim — many a modern pilgrim. Is it worth-while keeping on if you are not the kind of person

who is full of natural courage? If you *are* the kind of person who has hardly any courage at all. Is a lame pilgrimage worth anything? Many a soldier after the World Wars will ask a somewhat similar question. He will look down at legs that have been maimed and rendered useless. He will sit and look for the first time at a pair of crutches and know that they are for him. Perhaps he will ask — yes, surely he will ask, for he cannot help it — Is it worth it? Am I willing to go on, limping through life? And into the hospital wards will come others who have lost the use of their legs but who have learned to walk nonetheless — teachers of the difficult art of readjustment to a partly crippled existence. Some of these teachers, once on crutches, will prove that they need them no more. And so the disabled soldiers will make up their minds, one by one, to try it out. They will fight their way beyond discouragement, until little by little, painfully and wearily, they learn to walk — even on crutches. Some of them eventually will pass beyond the need for crutches: others will not. Yet they will find their lives worth-while — they may even find something better than that — much better — though they go on crutches.

Well, is it different with the spiritual pilgrimage? Worth-while? Of course it is! Anything to give? Of course there is something to give. Are crutches a doubtful bequest? — something not worth leaving behind? Let us not pronounce on this in too much haste. Let us go softly. There will be people who need crutches always. Always? Well, at any rate for a long, long time. Even spiritual crutches, I am afraid. Mr. Ready-to-Halt knew that — so he left his crutches to those who would bear his likeness, that they might follow him in his pilgrimage. And yet with some-

thing more. With "a hundred warm wishes" that they may do better than himself.

Notice that word, "warm." Bunyan chose his words well. He did not have Mr. Ready-to-Halt say "good" wishes; no, "*warm*" wishes.. Somehow, there is a marvelous wealth of kindness in that wistful bequest. One almost sees Mr. Ready-to-Halt's smile. And though he himself would never know it, there was a victory in that smile. Victory over disappointment. Victory over black despair. Victory over shame. Yes — and the kind of victory that invites no awe; that keeps nobody at a distance. There are times in this life when Mr. Ready-to-Halt is a much better counselor, as well as a kinder one, than Mr. Valiant-for-Truth. I do not say always. No, I say sometimes. For out of his pain has come a tenderness, one that a harsh and strident world could ill afford to lose. Out of his shame, a warmth of sympathy, an outreach of deepened, more affectionate understanding.

Look at him! There is something of wryness, something of a grimace in Mr. Ready-to-Halt's smile. The lines in his face are deep, and in his eyes there is the shadow of diffidence, of apology — apology for being there, for being there at all. And yet he does not accept humiliation as his destiny. Far from it. "I know I'm not much of a pilgrim," he says. But his smile says something more: "I do have patience; I have time, I have kindness, I have compassion. If you happen to be feeling weak and downcast I can keep you company. I know all about it. All."

Yes, I don't think we could do without Mr. Ready-to-Halt altogether, could we? Not yet. Not the way human life is at present. Mr. Valiant-for-Truth cannot lend us his sword. He may carve a way for us to follow him, but we cannot — some of us — wield his sword. If we could, if we

can, then we are Mr. Valiant-for-Truth, ourselves. But Mr. Ready-to-Halt could very well lend us one of his crutches — and he *would*, you know, he always would. It would be better not to need it — much better. Yet, if we do need it, well, there it is. And we certainly need those warm good wishes. There is something tremendously gallant about them. “A hundred warm wishes that he may do better than I have done.” It reminds me a little of the lines left by a shipwrecked mariner who perished on a lonely shore:

A shipwrecked sailor on this coast
Bids you set sail;
Full many a ship ere his was lost,
Weathered the gale.

Yes, Mr. Ready-to-Halt's successor might do better than he had done; might get away in the end from crutches altogether. Might lose his lameness. A hundred warm wishes go to him that he shall. It is true, perfectly true, that many a pilgrimage begun on crutches ends with a sword. Just as it is true that many a pilgrimage begun with a sword ends on crutches. For when our hearts are most open and our sympathy broadest, we know that human life must always be as frail as it is courageous. We cannot afford contempt. The stuff of pilgrimage is all the substance of humanity — both in its weakness and in its strength.

Therefore, whether with sword or crutches, or sometimes the one and sometimes the other, let us still be pilgrims! The journey is both dark and light, gay and sorrowful, swift and slow. The final truth is a truth so deep that only the tender spirit knows it. “Take up your cross and follow me,” said Jesus. Yes. But also this: “Come unto me, ye that are weary and heavy laden . . . for my yoke is easy and my burden light.”

I say again, the final truth is not a thing that any man can find swift words to utter. Only the tender spirit knows it — whether it be the spirit of Mr. Valiant or Mr. Ready-to-Halt, or a spirit not quite one nor yet the other — the spirit, perhaps, of most of us. For deep beneath all other knowledge, once the pilgrim way has revealed it, is the knowledge that neither faith nor hope is greatest. No, the greatest is always love. “For now abideth faith, hope, love, these three, but the greatest of these is love.” That is why, though faith will conquer in the end and hope will triumph at the last, love will win its victories all the way. It wins the world and always will — even when it goes on crutches.

Of Joy and Sorrow

“How is it,” we ask, “that a world which just a little while ago was confident and happy has suddenly turned grim and hideous?” There was a time, we think, not long since, when to be happy was a natural expectation. In those days life was full of promise, its goodness simple and believable. If there were wrongs, they were on the way to being righted; if there was grief, it had its instant solace; if there were evils, they were being dissolved away. Of course, there were always losses and occasional misfortunes; even at times, disasters. But we remember them as limited: quiet notes of dissonance in a symphony of contentment, plain to the ear but not belonging to the central theme.

Now, all the world is full of discord — as though a song had ended in a shriek of agony. No longer is life confident and full of promise nor its goodness simple and believable. As for gladness and contentment, there is for multitudes a sound of bitter mockery even in the words. Wrongs, far from being righted, have spilt the blood of millions; grief has no solace but is bleak and inconsolable; evil is trampling the beauty of the earth back into formless clay.

In such a world all grief becomes more poignant. All frustration is more wearing, all anxiety more intense. It

must be so, for we draw the substance of our minds from what is round about us: and that means, today, from pain and suffering, from cruelty and calamity.

We have descended -- or so it seems to us -- within a single generation from a pinnacle of sunlit hope to an abyss of desolation and despair. Our world has changed. Human experience has changed. What was born for the eternal youth of joy has suddenly grown old in sorrow.

But here we are wrong. We move too fast to false conclusions. We are not wrong, of course, in knowing that the world of a generation ago felt happier and more secure; not wrong in seeing that we are overtaken by calamity, not wrong in knowing that the world is passing through a painful and tormenting crisis. But wrong in thinking that the sorrows of mankind are new. We were no more born for joy than we were for sorrow. This has been the truth discovered and rediscovered over and over again, by every passing generation.

What do we suppose the psalmist meant when he cried out, "O my God, my soul is cast down within me. Deep calleth unto deep. All thy waves and thy billows are gone over me?" And after the psalmist, all the prophets; looking at the world with tears and heartbreak and prophesying with a choking in the throat? There never was a prophecy worth hearing that was not first spoken with a choking in the throat. And what of the poets? Which of them ever failed to hear "the soft, sad music of humanity"?

We are born for sorrow as we are for joy. That is the truth of life and any denial of it, however soft or soothing, is a falsehood. Religion that is not big enough to include sorrow in it is too small to bother with. It is false to reality and will surely let us down. Nothing really strengthens the

heart that blinds itself to the facts. How can it be otherwise? To shield the soul is to shrink it. If we are not ready for a religion that includes sorrow, we are not ready for religion at all.

What is happening in the present world is that we are learning again the transiency of all joy, the likelihood of loss, the omnipresence of grief. We are face to face once more with basic contradictions — contradictions which cannot be removed by plausible beliefs and lightly optimistic hopes.

How, then, can we find our way to truth? To a reasonable hope? To a faith to live by? Let us begin by going to those whose solutions came out of their experience, whose thinking and living were wrought together, whose thought came out of their life.

It is a remarkable fact that the only people who have been willing to accept suffering — and even to die, when called upon, for the sake of something more important to them than themselves — have been people who believed in life and loved it — like Socrates and Jesus. Men who accepted all of life; whose living, interwoven with their thinking, taught them that however mysterious and tragic life at its deepest might be, something great and purposive was active in it. These were their insights upon which they were willing to venture. I say “their insights” — for one difference between a merely intellectual use of the mind and one which results in an insight is this: in the case of an insight, thinking and living has been done together. The thought comes out of the life, is intermingled with it. It takes intensity of living as well as concentrated thinking to get at a fundamental truth. Unless the heart is open the mind may as well be closed.

And this is especially true of joy and sorrow. A heart that closes itself to pain will never know a deep joy. And in that event the mind will prove a useless guide to truth — for how can you know the truth of life if you shield yourself from living with it? The real tragedy of so many human lives is not the sorrow that visits them but their incapacity for containing it. They protect themselves — protect themselves against any great emotion whatsoever. They wall themselves in with a falsely prudent barricade of triviality. Knowing in a shallow sort of way that a full joy can swiftly become a full sorrow, they welcome no joys except tepid ones. Their hopes never run high; their convictions are never passionate. They never truly venture anything. In this way, they keep down mistakes much as a frugal merchant keeps down bad debts — by taking no chances. Their beliefs are always carefully balanced by the proper proportion of respectable doubt. They live precisely rationed lives, a little at a time; or, as T. S. Eliot puts it, they “measure out their lives with coffee-spoons.” When they die, it is merely the last little spoonful dripping away — almost cold and very stale. This, I say, is the real tragedy. Not that there is pain, but that so many try so desperately to fend it off — preferring littleness of heart — insensibility.

Let me say again, and now more plainly: life is neither joy nor sorrow. The one consistent flow of life is restless, ever struggling, ever changing — ever moving on. The power of it, its ultimate reality, its inner, holier spirit, is not the servant either of our happiness or of our grief. That final reality — to which devotion gives the name of God — is seeking something which joy and sorrow can advance but cannot bind. The heart must be stretched to contain it: stretched both by ecstasy and anguish. Yes, and by strength

and by weariness, by hope and despair, by fullness and emptiness — until the greatness of God's purpose can be shared. Until the life is stronger than the chill of fear and the fever of desire, both alike. Yet without being closed to either. Until there is room for far-off aims, for the true and the good and the beautiful that summon the soul to the ultimate quest; until the power of life has gathered its full intensity and dedicated it; until there is room for what Jesus called the Kingdom of God — the Kingdom of God within us — from which must come the Kingdom of God on earth. It was what Abraham Lincoln had in mind when he said, out of the depth of his own increasing understanding, "The Almighty has his own purposes." It is to these purposes that we must come.

What, then, of joy and sorrow? This! Let the heart be always open. Let it be open to joy. But let it never close upon joy; for joy cannot be confined or taken prisoner. Where it comes and whenever it comes, let the heart be festive. It is the saddest of all follies not to give joy ample room. What is man that he should measure and apportion happiness? Or put a bound upon it? Or embitter that of someone else? When the flame of life is bright, let it burn in the wind. Let there be laughter; and tears in laughter. Let there be joys that are close to pain. And let there be joy that rebels, that cries out,

. . . couldst thou and I with fate conspire,
Would we not grasp this sorry scheme of things entire,
And shatter it to bits, and then
Rebuild it, nearer to the heart's desire? *

* Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam, translated by Fitzgerald.

Joy, also, that is worship of beauty! Joy that dreams a thousand times the everlasting dream. Joy that makes music in the wilderness and spills over into song. Let there be joy in wonder, joy in mystery, joy in solitude, joy in fellowship — joy, too, that trusts itself to the hearts of others and is multiplied through being shared.

Let the heart be open to this — yes, even today. Wide open. For joy is life — it must be taken when it comes, and where, and loved — but not possessed. It cannot be possessed. Most of all, it cannot be enslaved. Joy does no man's bidding. Happiness has never known a master. When the heart is full, let it be open. This is living — and an open door to life.

If you think such counsel too extravagant, too unrestrained, too exuberant, especially for times like these, let me remind you that Jesus was once reproved because his disciples, in an evil time, were too spontaneously happy. And do not for a moment suppose that their happiness was of a watered-down variety: a sort of pious substitute for natural happiness. It was nothing of the sort. The passage is quite explicit. And Jesus said to his critics, Leave them alone. The time to mourn is when the occasion for mourning comes: they have reason to rejoice; let them be happy.

I say again, Let the heart be open. Let it be open to joy. But let it also be open to sorrow. Let the measure of the one be the measure of the other, or better still, let there be no measure. And do not be afraid. Sorrow is not a thing to seek, nor yet a thing to cringe from when it comes. I say that it should not be sought — and I do so because there is a kind of religion which almost deifies sorrow as an end in itself and this religion is distorted and false. We should have no use for hymns that glorify a fixation upon suffering or a morbid

preoccupation with death. This sort of religion has no sunlight in it. We must seek not exaggeration and deformity, but wholesomeness and truth.

When sorrow comes, let us accept it simply, as a part of life. Let the heart be open to pain; let it be stretched by it. All the evidence we have says that this is the better way. An open heart never grows bitter. Or if it does, it cannot remain so. In the desolate hour, there is an outcry; a clenching of the hands upon emptiness; a burning pain of bereavement; a weary ache of loss. But anguish, like ecstasy, is not forever. There comes a gentleness, a returning quietness, a restoring stillness. This, too, is a door to life. Here, also, is a deepening of meaning — and it can lead to dedication; a going forward with God to the triumph of the soul, the conquering of the wilderness. And in the process will come a deepening inward knowledge that in the final reckoning, all is well.

Yes, and we shall feel more honestly the heartbreak in the miseries of other people. When the heavy boots of tyrants trample, no matter where it is, we shall hear the echo of it at our firesides. When mothers watch their children starve, even though it be halfway around the earth, we shall feel the desolation of it. And when the blood of the nations flows in rivers and mingles with their native soil, we shall know the cost of liberty in every heartbeat — until we have learned, at last, another thing that joy and sorrow both are trying to teach us: that human redemption waits for brotherhood; that love alone can save the world.

This is the truth at last. The heart is not for joy, though joy can fill it. The heart is not for sorrow, though sorrow can overflow it. The heart is for love. Whence does it come — this love? From joy! Joy with its longing and its dream-

ing; joy with its need to shape and reshape the world to beauty. And from sorrow: sorrow with its wisdom and compassion; sorrow grown to tenderness, seeking and reclaiming the wasted places of the earth. From these together, love is born — love that is mightier than sin and tenderer than sadness: love that redeems despair: love that is God.

The Soul in Its Loneliness

"WE walk alone in the world. Friends, such as we desire, are dreams and fables." So says Ralph Waldo Emerson, in his essay on Friendship. Was it his New England austerity that made him think so? A certain restraint upon his own warmth that checked and limited the cordiality of others? Was Emerson perhaps not greatly gifted with a talent for close friendships, intimate companionship? Certainly there is a note of rather sharp disappointment in the way he phrases his opinion. Yet we have no sooner raised this possibility than we know that it will not do. Whether Emerson was a very friendly person or not, his insight is a universal one. Every man or woman with sufficient experience to know the truth will recognize that Emerson has very largely stated it. I say "very largely" because such a truth as this must always have a qualifying counterpart. Like all the greater truths, it leads to paradox. Nor is this merely because some mental quirk or incapacity divides our minds between antagonistic poles of thought, leaving us to see only one thing at one time and its opposite at another; it is because life itself, no matter what its liberations into harmony, is a thing of contradictions, not only outwardly but inwardly. We do walk alone in the world; yet we have friends

and intimates to whom we give our very hearts, fellow communicants in life's natural sacrament of shared experience. This is true not only of the humblest but of the greatest. Let me illustrate.

It can truly be said that Jesus of Nazareth was characterized by an exceedingly warm friendliness. He delighted in the company of other people, all sorts of people. There was no constraint upon him even when he consorted with respectable society's despised outcasts. He was able to be a dinner guest of very "doubtful" people, apparently without the slightest discomposure or embarrassment, establishing always and instantaneously an area of common ground. It is not to be imagined that he did this sort of thing because it was something he felt obliged to do, a sort of spiritual slumming; that would have been an act of condescension, at once resented. No, he did it because he liked to do it, almost without thinking about it, and he went on doing it in spite of the criticisms which such behavior inevitably aroused. He must have found satisfaction in it and, in one way or another, support for his own life, expression for his own personality; otherwise, he would not have gone on doing it. Friendliness of this kind never succeeds if it has to be forced; it is either natural or else a pathetic failure. Jesus liked people, needed them, all sorts of people. Whoever they were, he shared his life and thought with them, freely and simply, because it was his nature so to do.

In the presence of a crowd, he found himself inspired and held the fascinated interest of a multitude while he talked of what he had discovered in his own thinking, his own living and in the interplay of human experience. In the circle of his intimates, he opened wide his heart. He wanted his close friends beside him when the crowds had

departed, and even more when the crowds failed to appear — as eventually they did. He needed the solace of companionship in hours of emotional exhaustion. He took a few of his closest friends with him when he went away for days of quiet recuperation. "Come ye apart and rest awhile," he said. He needed the intermingling of other lives with his own; it was from this that his ever-active mind drew its increasing substance; he needed that his thought should penetrate and interfuse with the thought of others, deeply, and that he feel and comprehend the living flow of human experience while it was happening — while he shared it, friend with friend. He wanted to understand, yes, and to be understood. He wanted his sense of the value of his own life, his own mind, his own work, reaffirmed and reinforced by communion with those who loved him and whom he loved.

It is a great hunger, this! A great and almost insatiable hunger — for the communion of the soul's most intimate self with selves beyond it — with spiritual affinities. Jesus needed it, and so does everyone. It is a thirst of the heart in its deepest and most disconsolate yearning, and when, for a moment it is assuaged there is a joy that runneth over. Yes, it can truly be said that Jesus of Nazareth was characterized by a warm and natural friendliness, which, both in what it gave and what it took, was wonderfully deep and sustaining. Simply and freely, he shared his life with his friends.

Yet he was lonely. He withdrew at times from all companionship. His work began with a long sojourn alone in a wilderness. It ended with a lonely vigil in a garden. And all the way through — there is no denying it — there was something terribly solitary about Jesus. At times, he was remote to the point of being forbidding and awesome, so

much so that it severely tested the patience of his friends. In the company of his most beloved companions, he felt deserted and desolate, leaving them forsaken and woebe-gone. Their efforts to console him merely irritated him; their sympathy was clumsy and intrusive and he all but spurned it. His loneliness was hardly bearable; yet he *wanted* to be alone. It was not always as forlorn as this; yet he was never without a trace of it, even when his happiness was greatest in the company of his friends. Always, he was lonely. It can truly be said that Jesus of Nazareth was characterized by extreme loneliness.

Can both things be true? The answer is that both *were* true — *are* true. They are always true. Life itself as I said at the beginning, is a thing of contradictions. It is so in many ways. A great joy can clutch the heart like a great pain, so much so that we hardly know whether joy or pain is uppermost. In thought they contradict each other; in experience, they include each other. So with wisdom and folly. It takes a foolhardy man to be altogether wise, to follow his highest wisdom, for there is always imprudence, audacity, presumption, in such wisdom. Who was wiser than Socrates? Yet see what it brought him to! Is there any folly greater than to persist in behavior which leads to one's undoing? As a matter of fact, however, there was a strain of impulsive folly in Socrates all his life through. Yet the world agrees to place him on the highest pinnacle in the honored company of sages. Socrates proved, it seems, that it could be wise to be rash; hence his renown; yet did he not also prove that it is rash to be wise?

Even righteousness can reach the point of inner contradiction. Many righteous men for the sake of righteousness have wrought great evils. Calvin, for example. Perhaps that

is why the writer of the Book of Ecclesiastes in the Bible, so strangely warns us to "be not righteous overmuch"! (vii. 16) The philosopher, Immanuel Kant, was thinking along somewhat the same lines when he said that nothing is really good except a good will, a good intention. Embodied in actual experience, a good intention may become involved in one degree or another of evil, and consequently in its own contradiction. We must not feel affronted, therefore, when truth speaks to us in paradox. For while not all paradoxes contain much truth, profound truth is nearly always expressed in paradox. And it is true as well as paradoxical that the soul of man is naturally made for companionship, and at the same time, naturally lonely.

We grow by fellowship. The life of our minds and the joy of our hearts is very largely the gift of others. We long to share our lives with other people, to understand other minds, to be ourselves understood. Such fellowship, such communion, is life itself. If we are denied it, we become dwarfed and wizened, shrunken and distorted — spiritual starvelings. So closely are we intertwined with other lives — indeed with all the life of all the world — that all gain and all loss anywhere, all advance or all disaster everywhere, intimately affect us. As John Donne told us, "no man is an island, intire of itself." No, we are what we are because of the human world in which we live, a world of manifold relationships, and because of our intimates, our close companions, our friends. It is therefore obvious that we grow by fellowship — by relationship to other people, by not being alone.

Yet we remain alone . . . and lonely. In spite of all we have said, in the last analysis the soul is solitary. No matter how much of its life is owed to the world outside itself, or

even how much of its very substance, it never really quite meets another soul or altogether mingles with another life. By its own essential nature, it lives alone. Its communion at last is with itself, with its own inner solitariness. Nor is there any cure for such loneliness. Anything that takes away the soul's final solitude destroys it. I say this deliberately and in spite of all the lighthearted promises of so many shallow religions. Jesus' religion did not take away his inner solitariness. A great and true religion is the last thing in the world that is ever likely to do so. Every human being who ever lived, in whom was recognized the signs of greatness was inwardly and incurably lonely. If that final solitude could have been invaded and dispersed, there would have been no greatness, for it was there that greatness grew.

As I say these words, you will think inescapably of Abraham Lincoln. Was there ever a man more solitary? But he was also friendly, you at once remember. Yes, indeed, he truly was, with a heart open to all the world. He was also spontaneous and hearty; cheerful, jovial, even ribald at times. And whatever he was in any of his moods, he truly was; nothing was farther from his intention than to mask or hide himself. You met the real Lincoln whenever and wherever you met him. But *did* you? Wasn't there something that eluded you? Little minds have puzzled over this problem for many a baffling hour. Why, they say, when they read this or that incident, "He was just a politician!" Or just a weary man facing demands that found him inadequate and empty, or an unseasonable jester, jocosely when he should have been somber, or a melancholy recluse, brooding when he should have been active. Yes, or even just an unhappy husband, full of the pin-

pricks of domestic infelicity. These or any of a hundred other things. Add them up and what do you have?

Well, it all depends upon how you have taught yourself to add. It depends upon whether you know that before you begin to add there is an unknown quantity, and when you have finished adding, there will be another unknown quantity. If you know about these unknown quantities, you may not trouble to add at all. It may not be necessary. For you will know that all the interplay of mood and purpose which revealed Lincoln in so many ways, also concealed him — concealed what he was in his solitariness, and it was what he did with his solitariness that made him great. It was from what he found there that the things he said and did caught fire; this it was you dimly saw and felt the presence of, in everything else. You do not need to penetrate to the inside of a flame to see its incandescence; indeed, you never do see the essence of the flame itself: you see only its brightness in what it is consuming; in what, for the moment, it invests with itself while it burns. And the flame of life from which the soul of man springs to aliveness is fed from what it finds in its ultimate loneliness.

Let us see it in yet another way. Where does creative power originate? The stimulation comes, perhaps, from the world outside, from things observed, things said, from the common reservoir of shared experience. But where is the subtler meaning of all this distilled from its grosser substance? What is it that a poet contributes that turns the gleanings of his observation into the vivid insights of poetry? What is it that he breathes into his lines that gives them the breath of life? It is not to be found in his casual conversation, his ordinary commonplaces, his daily, pedestrian thoughts. It is not anywhere in the sight of him, the sound

of him or the sense of him; not in the ordinary life of him at all. Or if it is, then only the shadowy hint of it, the fleeting promise of its coming and going. Every true poem, says Robert Frost — I think it was he — begins with a sob in the throat. Yes, with something that comes from the soul — in its loneliness.

How unmistakable this is if we consider such an enigma as Beethoven! Crude in manners, barbarously inconsiderate, tempestuous, sometimes revoltingly gross, where was his genius, the disciplined, sensitive creator of the symphonies? Consider this, for example: that while he was writing his Fifth Symphony, being desperately short of money he entered into a contract with a patron to write another symphony, the one which was later known as his Fourth because it was finished earlier. The contract called for delivery of the composition, but Beethoven took the money and then refused to release the score. Instead, he merely permitted it to be played in the castle of his patron, then substituted the Fifth Symphony for it, then withdrew both, and finally gave his patron nothing but a front page with a dedication on it. Finally, he conducted the symphonies himself, at a concert for his own benefit, retaining both the title to them and the proceeds of the concert! A rather mean procedure for a great man. Meanwhile, his personal life was one not only of indulgence but of debauchery. He was extravagantly vain, his conversation was extremely Rabelaisian, his personal habits were those of a vagabond. In short, he was far from being an embodiment of even the humblest qualities of the poorest of his own sonatas. Yet, sonatas and symphonies, they all came out of him! Every fragile measure, every tender melody, every delicate variation, every majestic development, every grace and glory of some of the

greatest music ever made by man. He wrote it. He imagined it, wrought it, burgeoned it forth from his own inner being. Where was its source? Where did the joy of it come from, the pain, the despair, the hope, the triumph, the bitterness, the struggle, the mockery, the challenge, the bafflement, the victory — all of it sublime and perfect — where did Beethoven find it? He found it in his own soul's loneliness. It was there that he met it and turned it into music, knowing that if he could not have done so, he would have gone mad from the power of it.

In his own soul — beyond the touch of every taint of what he was in ordinary life, or else in transmutation of these things — he found his music. The grossness fell away, earthiness forsook its dust, rose from the soil, breathed of the breath of God — and lived itself into song. Whatever enters the soul, it seems, can become sacred with the soul's own sacredness, cleansed in the stream of the spirit's pure, essential essence, tempered and tuned to the everlasting and the uttermost, by the soul in its loneliness.

But, you say, this is greatness. We are humbler folk. We do not have the mystery and power of genius. None of this applies to us. Not so! Your kinship with the mystery and power of genius is attested by the yearning it awakens. To every soul there is this pain and potency — to every soul in its loneliness. You know it when grief comes. You know it in the dark night of your own life's wilderness. Though friends are near and companionship sweet, yet you are still alone. In the wilderness, there is none beside you. To your final solitariness, no other can come; no other, no matter how near or dear: you must go alone.

It is no different with an overwhelming joy. Or with the suddenness of unexpected revelation — new knowledge,

new wisdom — no more precious, perhaps, than sad. It brings the need to be alone. Wherever we are, instantly, instinctively, within ourselves we *are* alone. There is nothing we are able to communicate, nothing to say to another, even to another who knows, almost nothing we can share. We are alone because we must be: it is a thing required.

As it is, also, in the monitions of conscience. No matter how much we debate with our friends the right or wrong of what we have done, or mean to do, or no matter how much they reassure us of a thing of which we are in doubt, it has to be settled in the end in loneliness. It is not difficult to gain reinforcement for the wrong we wish to look upon as right, if we seek that reinforcement from those who have the same wish. It is not difficult to find company in resisting an advancing idealism, a moral challenge, a great purpose of love or brotherhood. It is not difficult to find friends who will compound our spiritual felonies, or justify our treasons, or condone us in apostasy. But in the end, conscience must stand alone, and what a man is, he is because his courage stood or gave when he faced the issues in his spirit's loneliness. No one need tell him what the truth is; no one need label the fabric of his lies. There are many lesser courts, inferior in moral jurisdiction, of which it may be otherwise; but the supreme court of the soul convenes in solitude and renders its verdict in silence. From such a verdict there is no appeal. Though the whole world tell a man that wrong is right, that injustice is just, that crumbs flung from the table are a sharing of the bread of life, that prejudice is true conviction, that a closed heart is big enough for brotherhood, that God is but the meanness of small minds writ large — though the whole world tell a man these things and though he win his way pretending to believe them, yet

he is convicted and condemned — by his own soul in its loneliness. Nor will he very long deceive his friends — even those who have condoned him and acquitted him. Just as murder placed a mark on Cain, so does the soul's hidden treason place a mark on those who commit it. No matter how bold the eye, it deceives nobody. No matter how confident the utterance, it carries no persuasion. For every man in his own loneliness will know the truth he helped his friend to weaken and distort. There is no escape. No evasion. No appeal. The life of every man is ruled at last, and its worth known, its pretences uncovered, its realities unveiled, by the soul in its loneliness. Well is it in the hour of intimate disclosure if he can say:

I thank whatever gods there be
For my unconquerable soul.

Yet this is not all. Not quite. Twice we have said that truth at last must often speak in paradox. There is still a larger truth to tell; and a further paradox. Not all men have believed it — not even all to whom it has come. Yet it is the undergirding of all the life of the human spirit, whether in fellowship or alone.

We may as well say it boldly; and in spite of all we have said before. The soul in its loneliness is never quite alone. There is always a sense of presence greater than itself. Its courage springs up out of itself and yet not *from* itself. The joy it finds, it could not have created; nor yet the solace, nor the power of conscience; nor the sudden, living stillness in the midst of storm. The soul in its loneliness is never quite alone. That is why — the only possible reason why — it is never altogether desolate, never quite empty, never entirely deserted, or without resource. That is why, in the wilderness, the soul can grow; there is a nurture in the wilderness

which its own vacant bleakness could never have supplied. From this, the soul renews its strength and finds its increase, moving not towards the abandoned and forsaken, but towards a closer kinship with that to which by natural essence it belongs.

That is how the glory, hidden in the life of man, first came to pass: the glory in all that genius has created, all that prophets and seers have known and told; all that saints have loved and lived by; from what they have done with their solitariness, from what they found in loneliness, from all that mingled thought with life, and joy with pain, and faced them with the final mystery. The mystery? There is another name. The soul in its loneliness, I say, is never quite alone. To those who wonder at it, this is a mystery; but to those who have met the mystery, face to face, and known and loved it, the natural name is God.

These ten sermons, preached from the free pulpit of All Souls' Church, Washington, D. C., to an overflowing congregation, are as deeply spiritual as they are unconventional. Though differing widely in subject-matter and mood, they all proclaim the prophetic faith of *an unrepentant liberal*—a faith unbound by tradition and expectant of the free and universal religion of tomorrow.

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